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OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

VOL. I.



OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

BY

THE HON. MRS. NORTON,

AUTHOR OF

"LOST AND SAVED,"

&c. &c.

'Slander is shipwreck by a dry tempest.'

Herbert's 'Jacula Prudentum.'

'The winds of change afflict us. What to-day

We tether tight, to-morrow whirls away.'

Hon. Robert Lytton.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD DUFFERIN AND CLANDEBOYE.

MY DEAR DUFFERIN,

This Book was to have been dedicated to your Mother; and it is a melancholy pleasure to me to remember that she read and warmly praised some of it, during her last illness, while the story was as yet incomplete.

Death has broken that unequalled companionship. The steady affection; the indulgent appreciation; the quick sympathy; the clear judgment; the womanly tenderness; the playful, kindly wit; the social charm;—all those lovely and lovable qua-

lities which surely never were before so perfectly combined with a rare and lofty intelligence, have vanished from amongst us, for ever.

There remains,—for you above all, but for me also, and in their measure and degree for all who ever lived in intimacy with her,—a great sorrowful blank, which nothing can suffice to fill; let the remaining years of life bring what they may!

I have seen more serious compositions than this present attempt of mine, inscribed, under such circumstances, ‘to the memory’ of the loved and lost. I will not so deal with a work of fiction; but rather ask you, for her sake, to accept this dedication in her stead.

I can fearlessly offer my attempt at a picture of youthful error in my wild rebel-

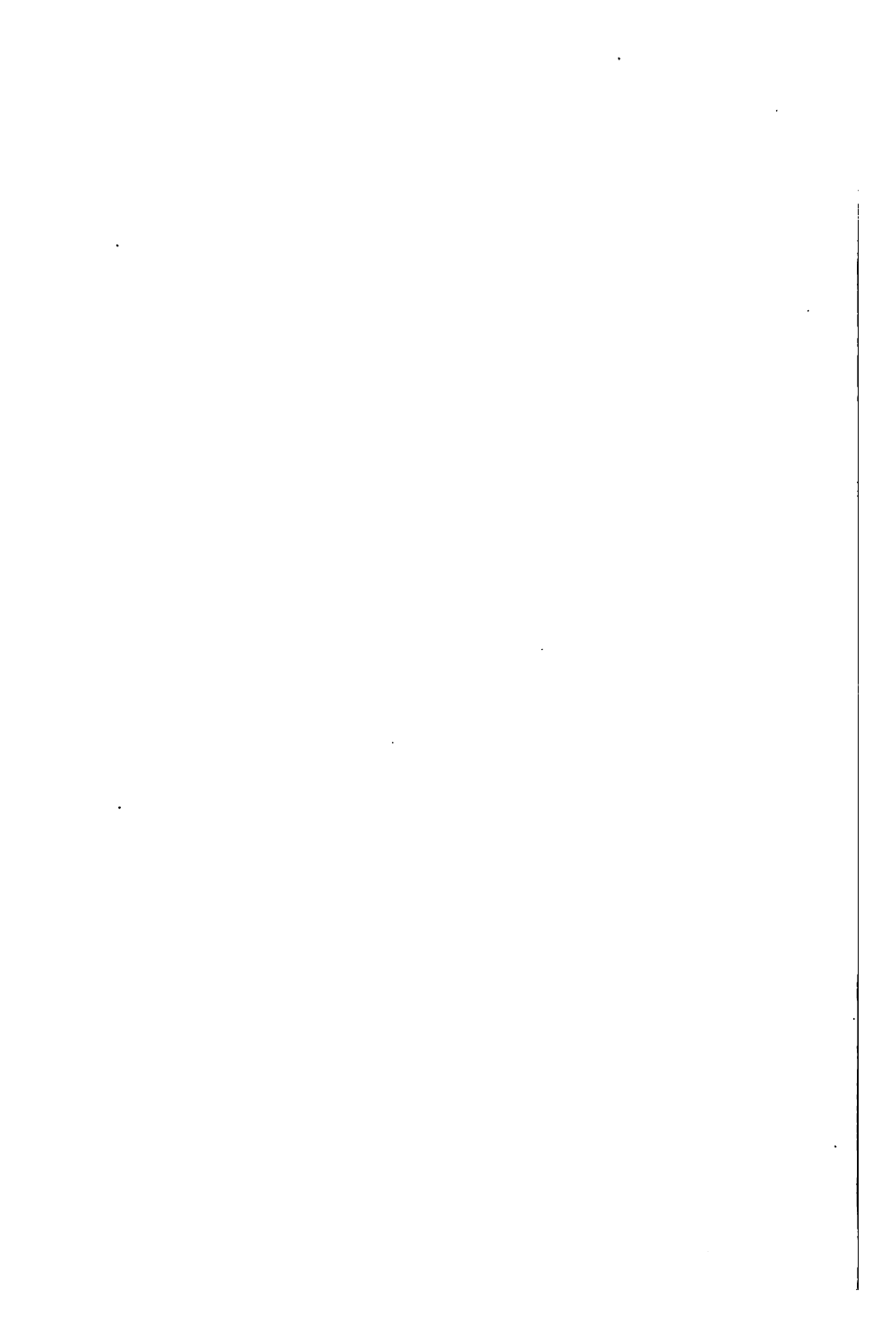
lious Kenneth, and of base and blame-worthy conduct in others of my story,—to you, whose whole career, from boyhood to the final hour of farewell, was one uninterrupted source of pride and satisfaction to her, and to all who belong to you.

Forgive the saying so much (since I fain would say even more) in a letter which is set here for all to read who will ; though it is inscribed only with your name.

And believe me, now and always,

Your affectionate Aunt,

CAROLINE NORTON.



OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

CHAPTER I.

Home, sweet Home.

THERE is no example of human beauty more perfectly picturesque than a very handsome man of middle age.

No, smiling reader, not even a very handsome young man : not even that same man in his youth. The gain is in expression, of which every age has its own ; and perhaps there is more change in that than in the features, under the working hand of Time. When luckless Dr. Donne wrote to the proud mother of the famous George Herbert of Bemerton and Lord Herbert of Cherbury—

‘ Nor spring nor summer beauty hath the grace
That I have seen in an autumnal face,’

it is to be feared he was more complimentary than veracious; for bloom is an integral part of woman's loveliness, and every day that brings her nearer to its withering takes away something of her charm. But with the other sex it is different. The youth who is noble-looking, glad, eager, gallant and gay as the young Lochinvar, will yet be handsomer when time shall have given him that air of customary command, of mingled majesty, wisdom, and cordial benevolence, which belongs to a later date; and which, in fine natures, results from much mingling with the joys, sorrows, and destinies of other men, with an increased instead of a diminished sympathy in all that concerns them.

Often, too, this is accompanied by a genial cheerfulness of manner, springing from the same source. At the age of which I am speaking, small annoyances have ceased to afflict: great hopes and fears are subject to a more noble reserve: the passionate selfishness of inexperience has vanished: the restlessness of learning how much or how little life can achieve is calmed down. The smile of welcome in such a man's countenance is worth all the beauty of his adolescent years.

And if there should be any of my readers who, in spite of this argument, refuse to become converts to such unusual doctrine, and obstinately adhere to a contrary opinion,—that is because they never saw SIR DOUGLAS ROSS OF GLENROSSIE, familiarly called by his tenantry and his few remaining family ties, ‘Old Sir Douglas.’

He had indeed been called by that name before he could reasonably be said to have earned it: before his dark and thickly-curled hair had shown any of those rare silver threads which the American poet, Longfellow, beautifully images as the

‘Dawn of another life—that breaks o’er the earthly
horizon,
As in the Eastern sky the first faint streaks of the
morning.

He was called Old Sir Douglas, chiefly, as it seemed, because everybody else was so young. His father had run away with a beautiful and penniless Miss Macrae, when he was scarcely twenty. At five-and-twenty he was a widower with two infant sons; and by way of at once satisfying his family, redeeming the past, and giving a second mother to those young children,

he wedded with the heiress of Toulmains ; a very stiff and starched successor to the blooming and passionate girl whom he had laid in her grave so early that his union with her grew to be a vague dream rather than a distinct memory.

But the sunshine was off the path of his life for ever : and perhaps that instinct of insufficiency to another's happiness, which haunts the hearts of those who live in intimacy together, even when those hearts are not very tender, crept into the hard shell where beat a sort of cold fish-life, in the bosom of the second Lady Ross, and soured still further a nature never genial. Hateful to her was the memory of that first wife ; displeasing to the last degree the sight of her orphan children and the sound of their prattle. She spent her time in steady efforts at repression, and in a series of inventive punishments, principally directed against the sin of liveliness.

She did not relax in her system even after she herself became a mother ; and the little pale shrewd sharp-browed half-sister she gave the boys, seemed indeed to have been modelled on her own pattern. Still, resolute, and reserved ; that tiny girl foreshadowed the woman to be, and faith-

fully transmitted the soul and spirit of her progenitrix.

Young as the first brood were when they lost their loving mother, they felt the change. Home was home still, but it was home *frappé à la glace*; and the efforts of Lady Ross to train and nail them as snow-berries not only failed, but produced, as years went on, a sort of chronic state of rebellion; insomuch that, even had her wishes been reasonable and gently expressed (two conditions that never existed), I fear she would have found the two boys, Douglas and Kenneth, wilfully provided with a stock of ready-made opposition.

In a household where the sole break in the monotony of discontent was a change from storms to sullenness on the part of the governing authority, and a corresponding change from passion to dejection in the young things that were to be governed, it was not to be expected that nature should be properly disciplined, or minds effectually taught. The boys learned as little as they could, and resisted as much as they dared. Their affection for each other was proportionate to their isolation at home, and before they were severally nine and ten years old, their chief pleasure was to

roam over the hills behind the castle, their arms twined round each other's necks, talking of the insupportable tyranny of stepmothers, as set forth in all the stories they had ever read, and planning wild and boyish attempts at escape from such thralldom.

From their father they received neither instruction nor guidance. Tormented and disappointed himself, his weak and impulsive nature took that turn to evil from which perhaps a pious, cheerful, loving helpmate might have saved him. Captious in his temper, drunken in his habits, given greatly to those open grievous twits and taunts in the wars of home, which seem to lookers-on so indecent and embarrassing—and which a man should be taught to govern and conceal in his soul, as he is taught to clothe the nakedness of his body,—his children combined an utter absence of respect for him, with a certain degree of prejudiced pity. If they did not think him always in the right in the family quarrels they witnessed, at least they always thought their stepmother in the wrong. 'Poor papa' was their kindest mention of him; and 'papa's too lazy to care' the common salvo to their conscience when doing something that had been absolutely forbidden.

At length came that crisis in their child-life which might be expected. Among the smaller obstinacies about which papa was 'too lazy to care,' and which was the subject of fierce reprobation with their stepmother, was the constant presence of two rough terriers, which had been given to the two boys, in the earliest stage of their mutual puppyhood, by the old keeper. Jock and Beardie were installed as idols in their young masters' hearts. Rustling through the brushwood, leaping over the purple heather, panting through the brawling burns, covered with dust or drenched with rain, as the case might be—in rushed, with a scuffle and a yelp of joy, sniffing for drink, or scratching for a comfortable resting-place, these four-footed plagues, as Lady Ross termed them; following, or followed by, the kilted little lads.

During the brief period allotted to their careless lessons, dog and master eyed each other with an equally intelligible agreement to 'go out the moment it was over,' when,—as if at the sound of a signal gun,—the scuffle, shout, yelp, and rush were renewed. Often had Beardie been chased angrily with a whip, to teach him indoor manners; often had Jock been seized by the scruff of his shaggy

neck, and tossed out of the low windows; often pulled out from slumbers surreptitiously permitted in the tumbled beds of their sleeping masters; often made to howl for flagrant discovery of bones half gnawed, and fragments of victuals, under those same little couches; often shaken out rudely on the bare floor when curled up for a nap in the plaided counterpanes. But it was in vain that Lady Ross scolded and stormed. The dogs did not understand what she would be at, and the boys were determined that where they went Jock and Beardie should follow.

On one especial day, the rushing, yelping, shouting, and scuffling, which attended their entrance, seemed redoubled: the boys had fallen in with an otter hunt, conducted by an experienced old gillie, their chief friend on the estate. They entered flushed, wet, panting, and joyous, leaving every door on their progress open, including that of the wide oak hall through which a whirl of wind and autumn leaves followed their reckless little heels, as if willing to share in the sport and the confusion. Then, dog and master, alike muddy, breathless and dripping, burst into the presence of Lady Ross, even as she sat in the

state drawing-room receiving the somewhat formal visit of the most puissant of all her Scotch neighbours, the dowager Countess of Clochnaben and the invalid earl her son.

‘Are those Sir Neil’s boys? They seem rudish little bears,’ was the polite speech of the dowager; as she hastily drew her ample dress nearer the boundary of the sofa, where the ladies were seated.

‘I told you to hinder that sort of thing,’ said the irate hostess to her husband after her guests had departed.

‘How am I to hinder it?’ replied he sulkily. ‘I’m just wishing you’d let the lads and their dogs be.’

Then rose one of those wild storms about nothing, which are at once the curse and the wonder of ill-mated married life: the wife ‘flyting’ at the husband; the husband swearing at the wife; the children staring at the loud battle and angry gestures; till, a portion of the wrathful torrent of violence being turned their way, they were ordered off to ‘make themselves decent for supper.’

That supper was not eaten, nor greeted other-

wise than with bitter cries and regretful tears ; for, when the boys recrossed the great hall adorned with the antlers of innumerable stags, they were met by their incensed stepmother. She pointed fiercely through the great arched door, calling out, "Since there's neither teaching nor managing will rule ye, and your father lets you run wild, we'll see if *I* can find means to make more impression :—I think you'll not forget to-day's otter-hunt in a hurry.'

Through the arch the boys gazed, in the direction indicated by her gaunt finger, and then stood as though she had turned them into stone by some weird spell. For there, on the two lower branches of a stunted old fir-tree, just outside the castle door, hung the two dogs ; horrid in their recent death by strangulation ; pitiful in their helpless dangling attitudes ; executed by a sudden doom ! Poor Jock, whose warm kindly brown eyes and rough nose were wont to bury themselves under Douglas's caressing arm ; and Beardie, handsome active and frolicsome Beardie, who had leaped so high to Kenneth's stick, and whose long silky coat of iron grey hair had been the admiration of all beholders !

There they hung! wet and draggled and weary-looking, as when they came in: but never more to dry their coats by the fire; nor lap from the great bowl of water set ready for them by the boys; nor lick the tanned little hands, in mute joy and gratitude, at the end of some pleasant day! There they hung: tongues out; eyes glazed; limbs contracted; with horrid evidences of a bygone struggle ending in a helpless death.

Kenneth was the first to break silence; with a cry that was almost a yell of despair and defiance, he made a dash towards the tree, opening his knife as he went, to cut his favourite down. Douglas stood still; panting, speechless, and breathless; his eyes riveted on poor Jock, as though he had no power to withdraw them from the dreadful sight. Then followed, from both boys, a wild echoing shout for their father—for their father to come and see what had been done by them during the brief interval they had spent in preparations for a more decent appearance in the sitting-room and at the family meal.

Nor did the easily excited ire of that father disappoint the boys' expectations. It went beyond them: it alarmed them by its excess. Louder

and more furious, and more and more intermixed with oaths, grew Sir Neil's rapid phrases of reproach to his wife, as the boys, sobbing and exclaiming, kissed the corpses of their canine companions ; till, at length, as with fierce and fearless defiance, taunt for taunt returned in the shrillest of voices, Lady Ross made a step or two in advance towards her husband, the latter seized her by the shoulders, shook her violently, and, with the exasperated words that she had 'done an ill devil's deed,'—and 'he wished from his soul she was hanging up alongside of the dogs,'—he thrust her from him against the tall heavy hat-stand that stood at the hall-door. The hat-stand fell over with a crash ; and though Lady Ross recovered her balance with a staggering effort, and did not fall, the excitement of the scene proved too much for Douglas, who, throwing himself between the contending parties with a piteous exclamation of horror, suddenly dropped at his father's feet in a dead faint.

He was a fine robust boy ; and the burst of emotion and its consequences once over, he rapidly became himself again. But neither of the lads would come into supper, or give any attention to

the persistent lecturing with which they were favoured by their stepmother. They remained out in the early moonlight till they had buried their dogs ; came in, and went heavily up to their own room, where they were yet heard sobbing and talking for a while ; and, in the morning, the two little rebels were missing. They had run away.

The preparations made by children on these occasions are not very extensive. A bag of oatmeal, a few apples, and a very slender remainder of pocket-money, would not have taken them far on their projected road to high fortune ; though in their first eager four miles they had considered it quite a settled thing that Douglas should become a warrior and statesman like the Duke of Wellington ; and Kenneth, at the very least, Lord Mayor of London.

They were pursued and brought back—foot-sore hungry and exhausted—at the end of their first day's march ; before they had got even to the suburbs of the market-town from which this plunge into worldly success was to be made.

While they crept once more (less loth than boyish pride might have avowed) into their accustomed beds, a parental council was held. Lady

Ross was of opinion that they should both be 'flogged for their escapade within an inch of their lives;' her husband, that no further notice should be taken of it; since they probably had had a sickening of such attempts, in their failure and fatigue. But the upshot of the debate was, that Douglas and Kenneth were parted; the elder sent to Eton for civilized training, in token of a certain concession to Lady Ross's English views on the subject; and the younger delivered over in gloom and disgrace to a neighbouring Scotch minister, who had one other forlorn pupil, and a reputation for patient teaching.

Undoubtedly the best education for man or boy is to mingle much with his fellows; and that is why a man educated at a public school is in general better educated than one who has received tolerably careful training at home. Lessons may not be so well learned, but Life is learned; emulation is roused; the mind is not allowed to roost and slumber, like a caged bird on a perch.

Douglas Ross owed to his inimical stepmother an immense service as to his future; though in her disposal of him she had merely consulted her desire to be rid of him, and certain consequential

notions of how 'the heir' should be educated. Had she had a boy of her own, perhaps some grudging might have mingled with such plans; but the sharp-browed Alice was her only child, and was an interest apart, and in fact subordinate, to Lady Ross's feelings of family consequence. Young Douglas would have justified a nobler pride. Frank, intelligent, spirited, and yet amenable to true discipline now that such discipline had replaced the alternate neglect and tyranny of home, he was popular alike with masters and companions; while the simplicity of such early training as he had had, rendered him insensible to the shallow compliments of strangers, struck with his personal beauty and free untutored grace of manner.

The holidays of many a 'half' to come, were days of rapture. To see Kenneth waiting and watching under the tall fir-trees at the turn of the road where the mail-coach was to drop him; to leap down, and strain him to his heart; to exhibit his prize-books, on which the younger brother would gaze with a sigh of curiosity—and then to plunge back into the wild happy life of the Highlands,—this made home a temporary

paradise. 'Days among the heather,' to those who have been brought up in the wild mountain-life of Scotland, are days of intoxicating joy.

Once more with his brother; once more in his kilt, clambering here and there, lounging under the silver birches by the blue lake's side, gliding over its silver surface in the coble-boat, fishing for trout, and waking the echoes as they rowed home with many a snatch of song; uncovering his glossy head for very sport in the sudden shower, and feeling a wild delight in the mountain storms;—young Douglas's holidays for the first three years were days of unalloyed delight.

Then came the gradual change which circumstances bring,—a change which is not exactly alienation, but separation, between those who are differently situated as to occupations, associations, and aims. A certain discontent, instead of approbation, took possession of his father's mind. The prize-books were tossed aside, with some discouraging observation as to the value of 'book-learning,' and the absurd disproportion of such rewards with the expense of such an education. Douglas himself had a sorrowful instinct that

Kenneth's life was narrowing round him,—he was a companion in all purposeless pursuits to his father, but the main elements of improvement were wanting. He smoked and sat up drinking whisky-toddy,—he shot and walked with Sir Neil. But he did nothing, and learnt nothing. It was the life neither of a boy nor a man; and the dawdling leisure left from its loose occupations was spent by Kenneth in familiar visitings wherever a pretty face smiled on the threshold of a farm-house, or a bothy in the glen; in idle talk with gamekeepers, farmers, and petty tenants; and in making love betwixt jest and earnest to the miller's youthful daughter at the Falls of Torrieburn; Torrieburn being a small separate estate of Sir Neil's, which was settled on his younger son.

In his own loving earnest way, Douglas hinted good counsel, but without good effect. Kenneth was angry; was saddened; was somehow suspicious that his Eton brother was 'coming the fine gentleman over him;' and a coldness stole between them, dreamy and impalpable as the chill white mist which rises among the hills at the beginning of winter, and hides all our pleasant

haunts and familiar trysting-places with its colourless and ghostlike veil.

With his stepmother he was on even worse terms than during his comfortless boyhood. Disliking her profoundly, and yet attempting a certain show of courtesy to his father's wife, his only reward was the bitter sneer with which she spoke of him as 'that *very* stately and gentlemanly young gentleman, Mr. Douglas Ross.'

With his father he was restless and uncomfortable. Too young when a resident at home, in the memorable days of the dog-hanging, to be the companion Kenneth had gradually become; and old enough now to see all the defects of such companionship; he inwardly groaned in spirit at his own incapacity to give, or to receive, satisfaction from communion with one who in his best days was a poor specimen of what the head of a family should be, and whose worse days were now come—days of mingled apathy and discontent, of absolute repugnance to the nearest tie in it, his irritable and irritating wife; of selfish craving for what amusement or comfort he could get out of the society of the half-educated lad he had kept at Glenrossie without a thought of his future;

and of angry surprise at the transformation, as it seemed to him, of the lovely, ardent boy whose small rebellions against discipline and Lady Ross he had so often protected, into the proud, thoughtful adolescent, who 'seemed to think he would advise the whole family.'

In this state of mind was Sir Neil, when Douglas asked that his brother might be put to some profession, and that he himself might be sent to one of the universities; and for once Sir Neil and Lady Ross united their discordant voices in a chorus of agreement, holding that his demands were preposterous, and not to be granted.

Sir Neil considered that already he had had too much of 'book-learning,' which was 'never of much use,' and Lady Ross told him that he was 'puffed with presumption' in venturing to chalk out for himself what was to be done.

Even Kenneth, the loved and clung-to Kenneth, was provoked; and hastily assured his brother it was lucky he had not succeeded in persuading his father, for that he, Kenneth, would certainly not have gone to study for any profession whatever. He meant to live at Torrieburn, and there'd always be grouse and oatcake

enough to satisfy *his* notions of life. The tears started into Douglas's eyes,—but there was no one to heed or understand what passed in his heart; and no evidence of that day's mental struggle, except in a brief letter to his Eton 'chum' Lorimer Boyd; younger son of that Dowager Clochnaben whose visit with the sickly young Earl of Glenrossie had been the exciting cause of the sudden execution of Jock and Beardie, and the exile of the run-away boys. The letter ran as follows:—

'TO LORIMER BOYD, Esq.

*' Oriel College,
Oxford.*

'MY DEAR LORIMER,—I am not to go to college; so I shall see no more of you at present! My father has consented, however, to my entering the army. Heaven grant I may do something more with life, than accept the bare fact of living! Kenneth is to remain on at home. I am sorry for Kenneth. Such a fine, quick, handsome lad! I wish you could see him. I wish my father had given him a chance. Do not forget me, old fellow;

I shall never forget *you*. I send you a little Elzevir "Horace" you and I used to read sometimes together under the trees by the river, that hot summer when you sprained your arm and had to give up rowing in the boats. I would be glad you wrote to me. I am sure you will, Lorimer. I don't mind owning to you that I feel so lonesome and disappointed I could cry like a girl. I hope you will distinguish yourself at college; you were much the cleverest fellow at Eton. I end with a *nil desperandum*; for, after all, I trust to our future meeting. You are a Scotchman, so am I; and some day I suppose I shall be at home again. Meanwhile, since I cannot be at college, I am glad to be a soldier.

'Yours ever,

'DOUGLAS ROSS.'

CHAPTER II.

Passing Away.

IF there were not daily examples to familiarize us with the marvel, we might wonder at the strange way in which Nature asserts herself; or rather, at the effects of Nature and accident combined, in the characters of individuals.

We see children, all brought up in one home, under the same tutelage, as different as night from day. Pious sons and daughters sprung from infidel and profligate parents; unredeemed and incorrigible rascals from honest and religious fathers; fools, that fritter away the vanishing hours they themselves scarcely know how, born where steady conduct and deep knowledge seemed the very life of those around them,—and earnest, intelligent, and energetic

souls springing up, like palm-trees in the desert sand, where never a thought has been given to mental culture or religious improvement.

Out of that home which looked so stately and beautiful among the surrounding hills, and held such grovelling inmates; the castled home of Glenrossie—went forth at least one scion of the good old name, worthy to bear it. Douglas Ross drew his sword in the service of his country, in India, in America, and in China; he rose rapidly to command, and proved as strict in authority as he had formerly been in obedience. Beloved, respected, and somewhat feared, his name was one already familiar in men's mouths as having greatly distinguished himself in the profession he had chosen, when he was recalled to Scotland, with leave of absence from the military command he held, to attend the rapidly succeeding death-beds of his father and brother.

Whether, in dying, some dim consciousness of his folly and injustice smote Sir Neil,—or that he was merely haunted by his lingering love for the son who had been left with him through recent years,—he made a sort of appeal

to the elder when bending anxiously over him to gather the failing words. 'You'll look after Kenneth,' he said; 'he has greatly mismanaged! You'll help him—Torrieburn's been ill sorted—he's let himself down, rather—with those people. My dear, be good to Kenneth—maybe he'll settle in the way of marriage, and do well yet. You'll have to make amends to ——'

Sir Neil made great efforts to conclude this sentence, but was unable; he held convulsively by his son's hand; looked in his face with that dying wistfulness which, once seen, is never forgotten; and fell back on the pillow exhausted—the anxieties, errors, and hopes of this world at an end for ever.

Brief was the time allotted to Douglas for any obedience to his father's dying wishes, as far as his brother was concerned.

Kenneth had insisted on riding home to Torrieburn every night, in spite of the urging of his brother. He did not seem to believe the end so near. He was wilful as to being at home in his own bachelor abode. He hated his step-mother, he said, and his half-sister, and did not wish to see any of their mock grief, for the

father who had at least treated him always with affection.

The night that father died, he rode away as usual. Torrents of rain, swept to and fro by the wild gusts of an autumnal storm, whistling and moaning through the ancient fir-woods at the back of the castle, greeted his departure. The crash of trees blown down, the roar of the swollen torrent, sounded loud in the ear of his brother, as he stood grasping his hand at the open door, and bidding him good night. 'If you will, you will, Kenneth; you were always a wilful fellow; but what a night!' And for a few minutes yet, Douglas Ross watched the receding form, full of grace and activity, of the handsome rider. 'I shall be with you early in the morning,' were his last words, as he waved his hand and put spurs to his horse.

But neither that nor any other morning ever brought Kenneth Ross to the castle again. Their father died in the night; and Douglas was still pondering over the anxious, needless recommendation of his brother to his kindness, when the day dawned, as it had set, in storms of drenching rain.

Plans of affection, of hope,—rational useful plans,—chased each other like the wind-borne clouds through the mind of the new-made heir of Glenrossie. Yes, he *would* 'look after Kenneth,'—Kenneth, and Torrieburn, and every fraction of his destiny! He would set that destiny to rights. He would think over a suitable marriage for him. He would give, lend, do, anything to get him out of the embarrassments his father had hinted at. And then he remembered the other concluding sentence of that father's dying voice: 'You'll have to make amends to—' To whom? Could it be some one who had already assisted Kenneth? Or perhaps to his stepmother? Sir Neil had never uttered his wife's name; he had begged she might not be present while he talked with his son at that solemn midnight hour. He meant to see her again in the morning. Could he have been going to recommend her, also, to Douglas's kindness?

He went to her room to break the news. He found her cold, impassive; indifferent to the fact; suspicious of his intentions. She pronounced but one sentence: it was, 'You

are aware, I suppose, that I've a right to stay at the castle for a year from this date ?'

Her daughter was with her ; she also looked at Douglas with her grave, shrewd eyes. There was a certain beauty of youth and girlhood about her, and her half-brother gazed at her with pity. He took her hand and said gently, 'Even if there were no right, do you think I would drive you away ? This is Home.'

Ailie drew her little thin hand out of his, as though she had been slipping off a glove. She sat mute. She gave no token even of having heard him, except withdrawing her eyes from his face, and casting a sidelong, furtive glance at her rigid mother.

While Sir Douglas still lingered—in the sort of embarrassment felt by warm-hearted persons who have made a vain demonstration of sympathy—a sudden tumult of vague sounds, the arrival of a horseman, the chatter of servants, the flinging open of doors, struck heavily through the silence of the room. 'There is Kenneth !' said Sir Douglas, as he hastily turned and opened the door into the broad, handsome corridor at the head of the great

oak staircase immediately fronting the entrance. The old butler was already there: he put his hands out as if deprecating the advance of a step: 'Mr. Kenneth was thrown from his horse last night, sir, and the doctor says he'll no live till the morrow,' was all he could utter.

Another death-bed—another and a dearer!

Sir Douglas rode to Torrieburn almost as desperately as his brother had done the night before. He found the handsome rider he had fondly watched at his departure, a bruised, shattered, groaning wretch. His horse, overspurred, and bewildered by the drifting rain and howling storm, had swerved on the old-fashioned sharp-angled bridge that crossed the Falls of Torrieburn close to his home, and had dashed with his rider over the low parapet in among the rocks below.

Close to home; luckily, close to home!

Near enough for the wild shout he gave as he fell, and even the confused sound of the roll of shaken-down stones, and terrible weight of horse and rider falling on the bed of the torrent, to reach the house, and the quick ear of one who was waiting and watching there. For

Kenneth's bachelor home was not a lonely one. Startling was the picture that presented itself in that drear morning's light when Sir Douglas entered. The weariest frightened form he ever beheld in the shape of woman, sat at the foot of the bed. Untidy, dishevelled, beautiful; her great white arms stretched out with clasped hands, shuddering every time that Kenneth groaned; her reddish-golden hair stealing in tangled locks from under the knotted kerchief, which she had never untied or taken off since she had rushed out into the storm and scrambled down to the Falls the night before. The lower part of her dress still soaked and dripping, covered with mud and moss—one of her loose stockings torn at the ankle, and the blood oozing through—her petticoat, too, torn on that side. She had evidently slipped in attempting to reach the horse and rider.

Douglas spoke first to her, and he spoke to her of herself; not of his brother.

'Och!' she said, and her teeth chattered as she spoke, 'ye'll no mind me, sir! it's naething. I just drappit by one hand frae the brae, in amang the stanes to get at him, and sae gat hurtit. Ou Kenneth! Kenneth! Kenneth! Ou my man!

my ain man !' and rocking wildly to and fro while the rain beat against the window, and the storm seemed to rock the trees in unison with her movements, she ceased to speak.

The dying man moved his lips with a strange sort of smile, but no sound came. Douglas knelt down by him; and, as he did so, was conscious of the presence of a little nestling child, the most lovely little face that ever looked out of a picture, that was sitting at the bed-head, serene and hopeful in all this trouble, and saying to him with a shy smile,—‘ Are ye the doctor? and will ye put daddy a’ richt? We’ve been waiting lang for the doctor.’

No doctor could save Kenneth—no, not if the aching heart of his elder brother had resolved to bring him life at the price of his whole estate. He was fast going—fast! The grief of the ungovernable woman at his bed-foot only vaguely disturbed him. He was beginning to be withdrawn from earthly sights and earthly sounds. But Sir Douglas tried to calm her. He besought her to be still; to go away and wash her wounded limb and tear-swoln face, and arrange herself, and return, and meanwhile he would watch Ken-

neth till the doctor came. No, she wouldn't—no, she couldn't—no, he might die while she was out of the way—no, she 'wad see the last o' him, and then dee.' She offered no help; she was capable of no comfort; she kept up her loud lament, so as to bewilder all present; and it was a positive relief to Sir Douglas when, with a sudden shiver through her whole frame, she slid from the bed-foot to the floor in a swoon.

By this time the doctor had arrived, with an assistant, both of them common 'bone-setters' from the village of Torrieburn—rough, untutored, but not unkindly; and perhaps in nothing more kind than in the honest admission that beyond giving restoratives for the time being, and shifting the bed a little, so as to lessen (not remove) the great agony of human pain that must preface this untimely death, they could do nothing.

DO NOTHING! very solemn and trying are such death-beds; when human love, that seems so strong, stands helpless; listening to the great dreadful sentence, 'You shall see this man whom you love pass to the presence of his Creator in torments inconceivable, and you shall not be able to lift away, no, not so much as one grain of his

bitter pain, though you would give half your own life to do it.'

'God's will be done!' Oh! how hollow sound even those solemn words; while we echo, as it were, the writhing we look on at, in the thrill of aching sympathy that goes through our own corporeal frame; and wait, and wait, and wait, and know that only Death—only Death—can end the anguish; and that when he has ceased to suffer we are alone for ever in the great blank. No more to hear his voice, no more to clasp his hand, no more to be conscious of his love; but to know that somewhere there is a grave, where he who suffered so much lies stiff and still,—and that 'his spirit has returned to God who gave it.'

When the doctor had arranged that dying bed for the best,—and had attended to the miserable woman who had fainted, and had brought her back, pale, exhausted, but quieter, to the sick chamber,—Kenneth made a feeble effort to raise himself; an exertion which was followed by a dreadful groan. Then he murmured twice the name of 'Maggie!—dear Maggie!' and Sir Douglas rose up, and made way for the trembling creature so called upon, to kneel down in his

place: adjuring her, for the love of heaven—for *the love of Kenneth*—not to give way, but keep still; getting only from her a burst of sobbing, and the words, ‘Kill me, och! kill me! and then maybe ye’ll hush me down.’ There seemed ‘no hushing her down,’ till suddenly Kenneth said, in a sort of dreamy voice, ‘Maggie, you’ll call to mind the birken trees—the birken trees!’

The woman held her breath. There was no need to quiet her now.

‘The birken trees by the broomy knowe,’ repeated he, dreamily; and in a low clear tone he added,—‘I’m sorry, Maggie.’

Then, opening his eyes with a fixed look, he said, ‘Dear Douglas!’ in a tone of extreme, almost boyish tenderness; and then followed a renewed silence; broken only by the wild gusty winds outside the house, and the distant sound of the fatal Falls of Torrieburn. All at once, with the rallying strength that sometimes precedes death, he spoke clearly and intelligibly. ‘Douglas! be kind—I’m going—I’m dying—be kind to my Kenneth, for the sake of days when we were boys together! Don’t forsake him! don’t deny him! Have pity too, on Maggie!’

A little pause after that, and he spoke more restlessly :—‘ I ’m asking others, and I ought to do it myself. It’s *I* who forsake them : it’s *I* that didn’t pity. I say—I say—are you all here? Douglas! the doctor—ah! yes, and my father’s factor,—Well—I—’

He struggled for a moment, with blue blanched lips ; then, feeling for the little curled head of the child at the further side of his bed, and locking his right hand in the hand of the kneeling woman, he said,—‘ I trust Douglas with these. I declare Margaret Carmichael my WIFE, and I acknowledge Kenneth Carmichael Ross as my lawful son ! ’

The woman gave a suppressed shriek ; she sprang up from her knees, and flung her arms round the dying man with a wild, ‘ Och, I thank ye—I thank ye! and mither ’ll thank ye for ever! Ou! my Kenneth ! ’

He turned his head towards her with that unutterable smile that often flits over dying faces. Brighter and fonder his smile could not have been in the days of their first love : ‘ by the broomy knowe, under the birken trees ; ’ and perhaps his thoughts were there, even in that supreme hour. No other word, except a broken ejaculation of

prayer, came from him ; only the bystanders ' saw a great change '—the change there is no describing—come over his brow. The anguish of mortal pain seemed to melt into peace. A great sigh escaped him, such as bursts from the bosom in some sudden relief from suffering, and the handsome man was a handsome corpse.

HE who had been so much to that wailing woman, had become IT ! ' it ; ' ' the body ; ' that perishable form which had clothed the eternal soul, and was now to be carried away and hidden under the earth, ' to suffer corruption,' and join the unseen throng of those whose place in this world ' shall know them no more.'

The loud sound of her tempestuous wailing seemed to float out and follow Sir Douglas, as he at length left the house and recrossed the dreadful bridge which had been the scene of that tragedy. The dead horse, whose neck had been broken in the leap, was still lying there ; the waters gurgling round the new obstacle, and waving the glossy mane to and fro, like a row of reeds. The dreary rain was still drifting with the wind against the soaked stems of the fir-trees ; and the scarlet berries and yellowing leaves of the

mountain-ash or rowan-tree, tossed and swung above the torrent, far overhead; dropping now and then a bead of red like a blood-gout, into the whirling waters that swept them away.

Even so were swept away all the hopes, plans, and resolutions made only the night previous in behalf of his brother, by Sir Douglas Ross of Glenrossie. And as the sobbing storm died down on wood and mountain, and one pale crimson and melancholy streak gleamed light from a sunset that promised a better morrow, even so did the gleaming hope of being of use to little Kenneth (so like the Kenneth his earliest boyish recollections brought back to him!) break through the miserable gloom in his kindly mind.

On arriving at the castle he described the scenes he had witnessed, and the death that had so unexpectedly taken place, to Lady Ross. She heard it, as she had heard of the death of her husband, with frigid composure. Her daughter also seemed unmoved, except by a certain amount of surprise, and the curiosity of one who listens to the account of a strange event.

But when Sir Douglas, endeavouring to repress the evidence how much he himself was

moved, wound up his narration by endeavouring to enlist what pity there might be in Lady Ross's heart, for the orphan and his wretched parent, then indeed a slight change was visible in Lady Ross's countenance.

The indifference that had reigned there was replaced by a look of supercilious scorn; and, when Sir Douglas imprudently faltered—'Being yourself a mother, I thought perhaps ——' she flashed that look of scorn full upon him, with the speech, 'I beg to remind you, Sir Douglas, that I am *not* the mother of children legitimatized on a death-bed. Nor am I a miller's daughter; which, I understand, was the social position of Meg Carmichael. I was not ignorant of the indecent infatuation of your brother for that low-born and low-bred girl; and the last thing I should have expected from *you*, on coming into the estates, was the admission of such base claims on the part of persons who have no more real right to Torrieburn than your father's head-keeper, and are about as fit to set up there as lairds of the place.'

CHAPTER III.

Clay Idols.

IN spite of the opinion thus enunciated by the widow of his misguided father, Sir Douglas took up the trust his brother left him in all the simplicity of good faith. Little Kenneth was acknowledged and installed as 'Kenneth Carmichael Ross of Torrieburn;' and a tutor appointed to teach and care for him as the young laird.

Fain would Sir Douglas have removed him from his mother, and from all the early associations of the place; but the same ungovernable spirit, which had struck him with so much amazement at the time of poor Kenneth's death, was displayed in all her dealings with others. Her grief was despair: it was followed by a nervous fever: the fever by a disturbed state of nerves bordering on insanity. And then she

recovered,—like a creature that has moaned for its whelps and gradually forgotten them.

No sooner had she lifted from the pressure of that woe, than a wilfulness exceeding all poor Kenneth had ever shown, took its place. She considered herself, under that declaration of marriage, as the natural occupier and possessor of Torrieburn House till her son should be grown up. She established her mother there, as indeed might have been expected; her father, the old miller of Torrieburn, coming frequently over—sometimes to complain of the inconvenience of his wife's residence apart from him, sometimes to quarrel both with her and her daughter, sometimes to carouse with companions for whom she could scarcely refuse to provide whisky in a limited or unlimited quantity. With the first tutor appointed to the care of her son she entered into relations so unseemly, after the subsiding of her grief, that, the fact coming to the ears of Sir Douglas, he wrote her a letter of remonstrance; and substituted a somewhat stern but very sensible pedagogue in his stead, with whom she incessantly quarrelled, and from whose authority she encouraged her boy to appeal. Sir

Douglas was always receiving letters from the boy or his mother complaining of severity, complaining of injustice; till, at length, wearied out by petitions and objurgations, a fresh substitution was made, and a tutor sent of good education, with excellent recommendations, and private instructions to 'show as much indulgence as was consistent with good discipline.'

This time Meg Carmichael made further changes impossible, by *marrying* the tutor: and the ill-assorted household continued on the most comfortless footing,—the wayward, handsome woman alternately quarrelling with her husband, and giving herself airs as 'Mrs. Ross Heaton of Torrieburn,' or bestowing on him some of the wild adoration which had formerly been the portion of poor Kenneth: and the tutor-husband vainly trying to make head,—in the house that was scarcely to be called his own,—against the drunken old miller and his boon companions; the bustling and shrewish old woman his wife; and the disposition to shirk all control and all guidance in the lovely little boy, whose position, as the future 'laird,' was acknowledged, in different forms of folly and flattery, by all around

him in the narrow circle of home. A hint from Sir Douglas that it would soon be time to send him to a good school, was received with such a storm of indignation and despair, such ill-spelt ill-worded letters of passionate remonstrance, that Sir Douglas put off all further alteration in young Kenneth's destiny till he could get home from his command, and personally superintend the necessary changes. That the boy was well taught by his tutor-father was evidenced by the letters he wrote; and which, though they half-nettled, half-amused Sir Douglas by their tone of presumption, addressing him entirely '*d'égal en égal*,' were such as no boy of inferior education or inferior intelligence could possibly have penned.

At length the day came when Sir Douglas Ross of Glenrossie returned as a resident to the home of his fathers! His step-mother had been dead some time; but her daughter had, by his own express wish, continued to reside in the castle; nor had he the heart, when he found that lonely young spinster there, to enter on the topic of her removal. It would be time enough for that, Sir Douglas thought, when he was

married; if he ever married. Her mother had been odious, but that was not the daughter's fault; and there was nothing offensive in her, personally. On the contrary, she appeared especially anxious to preserve the home she had acquired, by the most absolute acquiescence in her half-brother's wishes, and a disposition to see to all those minor arrangements of a household which a man cannot see to himself, and which that astute and reserved little personage performed as well as any hired housekeeper, if not better.

When Sir Douglas first beheld the boy for whom, unseen, he had been caring, and whose future he was so anxiously about to arrange, soldier though he was, he burst into tears!

Kenneth stood before him. Kenneth in the days before they were parted—Kenneth when they used to climb the hills with their arms round each other's necks—Kenneth before the cold cloud of difference mistily rose between them. And though Sir Douglas kept to his resolution, and sent the lad both to school and college,—undeterred by the loud wailing of Mrs. Maggie Ross, who ran along the edge of

the highroad weeping and waving her handkerchief at the mail coach the first day he departed, and constantly made his recurring holidays terms of the most corrupting influence of folly and over-indulgence,—yet the depths of love he felt for that orphan lad were such as rarely exist even in a father's heart for a favourite child. It was a passion with Sir Douglas. What this new Kenneth did, said, or thought, was the principal occupation of his own more mature mind. Inwardly he vowed never to marry: to bring the boy up as his heir: to make his home not at Torrieburn but Glenrossie, and suffer that living image of his dead brother to 'come after him,' when he, too, should be dead and gone.

As time rolled on, however, much anxiety was mingled with Sir Douglas's love. The wayward son of that wayward race seemed turning out yet more wayward and rebellious than all that had preceded him. Drunkenness, a love of low company, of being what is vulgarly termed 'cock of the walk,' the most profuse extravagance as to money matters, and a sort of careless defiance of all authority, more especially of the constituted

authority of his stately uncle, whom at this time he and all around him took to calling by the title I have already commented upon, 'Old Sir Douglas,'—all these defects, and more, showed themselves in Kenneth's son. And all these defects did Sir Douglas believe he could, by care and resolution, weed out of that hot young head and heart, as the gardener weeded the broad walks in the long-forsaken gardens of Glenrossie. Twice had he paid the debts of the young collegian, and received in answer to his imploring lectures, the most satisfactory promises for the future. A third time he called upon his uncle to clear him; and this time Sir Douglas thought fit, greatly to the young man's discontent, to consider his college career as closed, and send him to travel. Fain would he have made the lad his own companion, but there was so much chance of ill-will and hot blood in the attempts at control over his actions that he dreaded to undertake it, lest it should make 'a break' between them.

With the most liberal allowance it was possible to grant, and the most intelligent companion he could find,—little over Kenneth's own age, and full of good and amiable qualities,—Sir Douglas des-

patched his nephew on what in old-fashioned days was called 'the grand tour;' and, with a pang at his affectionate heart, stood on the steps at the castle entrance, to see that handsome, careless head smile a final farewell from the chaise window; and waited till the sound of wheels died away in the distance, and lifted his cap with a half-murmured prayer, before he turned back into the great hall.

There, everything looked as it did in his own boyhood and adolescence! Looked as it did when he ran away from home; when he was sent to school; when he returned in eager gladness to be pressed in Kenneth's arms; when he tried to persuade his father to give Kenneth some profession; and when he looked out into the stormy night, and saw that brother ride away for the last time.

And as all these scenes chased each other through his musing mind, all terminated in the one leading thought, what would be the future of Kenneth's son?

The accounts sent from time to time were far from reassuring. Young Kenneth acknowledged no power of control in the student-companion

allotted for his tour, but treated him as a sort of confidential courier ; bound to take all trouble off his hands, provide for his amusements, and carefully administer to his comforts, but nothing more. The one vice, too, from which Kenneth had hitherto been guarded, that of immorality,—which his mother, remembering her own destiny, watched over with a jealous care she bestowed on nothing else,—seemed rapidly to be taking rank among the young laird's already established errors ; till at length Sir Douglas received one morning, by the early post at Glenrossie, a very long, very tender, very comfortless letter from the friend of Eton days, Lorimer Boyd, then at the English Legation at Naples, informing him that young Kenneth, whose acquaintance he had made with the most eager interest for Sir Douglas's sake, was becoming a noted character among the English visitors, with anything but credit to himself and family ; that the young man who had been engaged to accompany him, desired to resign his trust into Sir Douglas's hands ; feeling it to be positively dishonest to continue receiving a high salary, as travelling tutor, for the supposed performance of duties which the disposition of

Kenneth Ross rendered it impossible to fulfil. Finally, that he thought Sir Douglas could not do better than come himself to Italy, where Lorimer Boyd would be overjoyed to see him, and where new arrangements might, he hoped, be made; ending with the ominous words, 'for, if something is not done, and that speedily, I should fear that this young lad, to whom you have shown such generous kindness, will turn out utterly worthless.'

The next day saw Sir Douglas Ross on his way to London, to procure his passport and proceed to his destination. He reached it without event; and, in the satisfaction evinced by Lorimer Boyd, and the pleasant converse of that old friend, half forgot the pain of observing that his unexpected coming had produced in young Kenneth no other evidence of emotion than a sort of discontented surprise.

'Well, well,' thought the uncle, indulgently, 'he probably knows he has been complained of, and I must make allowance for that.'

In the evening, fidgeting a little over the long colloquy after their late dinner, at which Lorimer Boyd was the sole guest, Kenneth said, 'I am now

going out; going to a party,—a very decent family party,’ added he, with a half saucy, half angry smile. ‘Will you come too, Uncle Douglas? I know Mr. Lorimer Boyd is dying to get there, instead of talking any more to you, for there is to be amateur music, and some of his particular friends are to sing.’

The words were spoken with emphasized meaning, and something of gloom and displeasure overshadowed Lorimer Boyd’s countenance. Apparently, in spite of assumed carelessness, the young man felt this; for he added hastily, ‘I believe he’s as fond of music as you are, uncle, and that is saying a good deal.’

‘My dear boy, I’ll go wherever you are both going; we can all go together; if Lorimer will undertake to introduce me, I shall be charmed to plunge at once into the dissipations of Naples.’

Lorimer started out of some sort of reverie in which he had been absorbed; and, with half a sigh and half a laugh, he said, ‘I fear you won’t find much to charm you in the set that are at present in Naples; but this is a pleasant house; and certainly the music is divine.’

Lorimer Boyd made his introduction with a

degree of shyness, which no experience of the world had conquered in him ; but stately Sir Douglas was greeted with great eagerness, as a new comer amongst the little society ; nor were there wanting looks of surprised admiration and whispers of inquiry, as the handsome soldier made his way through the busy crowd to a place near the piano.

For it was true that Sir Douglas was very fond of music ; and the one faint recollection he retained of his mother was the shape of her lovely mouth and the soft darkness of her eyes, singing some snatch of an old ballad of unhappy love :—

‘ He turned him round and right about
All on that foreign shore ;
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
With “ Adieu for evermore, my dear,
Adieu for evermore ! ” ’

Nothing is so capricious as memory. Why one incident is remembered and all others forgotten—why a person with whom we have lived in intimacy for years is always recalled by one, or, at the most, by two or three different aspects, on occasions neither more nor less important than

a thousand others,—are mysteries of the working of the brain where these memories are packed away, which the profoundest of our philosophers have been, and are, unable to solve. But certain it is that among other caprices of memory Sir Douglas, who had lost his mother in his childhood, remembered her chiefly by her songs; and above all by that versified farewell which could have conveyed no idea to a child's mind beyond the vague sadness of intonation. Whenever he thought of his mother, he heard that stanza float upon the air. He was thinking of her now, in the midst of that assembly of strangers; with no other mainspring to those thoughts than the sudden touch given by his nephew's remark that he was fond of music.

His thoughts wandered, too, to a beautiful German fable as to the effect of certain singing—one of their wild stories of water spirits; in which the hero, impatient at the old ferryman not being in attendance to punt him across a river, *swears* a good deal; is stopped by a young girl who says she is the ferryman's daughter, and offers to punt him over in her father's absence; accepts the offer, but is greatly troubled in his mind by the

fact that the reeds keep bowing wherever the boat passes, though there is not a breath of wind; and that, as the young girl herself bends to the water, her face is reflected there, not as she actually appears, but with a wreath of lilies round her head. He comprehends immediately (as people do, in dreams and in German ballads), that she is something supernatural,—and spends the remainder of his shortened and grieving days in perpetually paddling in and out among the reeds; calling for her, looking for her, pining for her, because, as the poet writes it, he has been bewitched ‘by that little red mouth so full of songs!’

Sir Douglas was roused from his fanciful musing, by a real song; and, by some strange coincidence, a German song. A young lady had sat down to the piano. His nephew was standing by her, waiting to turn the leaf when the verse should be completed. She shook her head gently, and said, in a low voice, ‘I know them all by heart.’ Then came the rich melody of one of those soft contralto voices the very sound of which gives the sensation of a caress to the listener; rich and powerful but a little trembling

too,—not with the trembling of shyness, but with that peculiar *tremolo* natural to some voices, which rather adds to, than takes away from their power.

A German song; a German ‘Good-night;’ something ineffably coaxing, soothing, and peaceful in its harmonious notes. Involuntarily Sir Douglas sighed! He felt a strange contrast between the anxiety that had prompted his hurried journey—the storms of his past life,—and his present feverish fatigue and worry,—with that delicious lullaby!

The girl who was singing, glanced towards him, at the sound of his sigh; with soft hazel eyes that seemed made to match her voice. Then she asked something in an undertone of young Kenneth, and the reply was distinctly heard; ‘It is my Uncle Douglas.’

The young lady’s reply was also audible, in the silence that followed her song. She said, in a tone of great surprise, ‘*That*, Sir Douglas? *that*, Sir Douglas Ross?’

‘Yes,’ said Kenneth, testily; ‘why not?’

‘Oh! I don’t know,’ said the girl, laughing shyly; ‘only it is not at all my idea of him. I

never should have guessed that to be him, from your way of talking. I expected——’

‘Expected what?’

‘I don’t know; but I should never have guessed that gentleman to be your Uncle and Guardian, “Old Sir Douglas.”’

As she spoke the last words, she again looked up at the newly-arrived stranger. Sir Douglas’s eyes were fixed upon her. It was but too evident he had overheard what she had said. Both felt embarrassed as their glances met. Sir Douglas coloured to the temples; and the young lady blushed, and looked down at the ivory keys of the piano-forte: those familiar little friends whose aspect could not add to her shyness as did this interchange of human gazing.

And Kenneth also looked down at the keys; and turning over the leaves of the music-book, which still remained open, he sharply bit his underlip; while a very sulky expression of vexation darkened over his very handsome young face.

CHAPTER IV.

Uncle and Nephew.

THE pleasant evening was followed by a painful morning. Sir Douglas ascertained from Lorimer Boyd that, with the one exception of Lady Charlotte Skifton's (where that evening had been passed), Kenneth Ross had scarcely footing in one respectable house in Naples. His nights were spent at the theatre, the gaming-table, and in wild orgies with the idlest of an idle Neapolitan aristocracy; and his days in recovering from the debauch of the night.

Sums perfectly fabulous, considering his position and the amount of his very moderate fortune, were owing in all directions;—and thrice, but for the painstaking interference and discretion of Lorimer Boyd,—the result of quarrels on the most trivial or the most scandalous grounds,

would have been a meeting with adversaries not very nice in their code of honour, and infinitely better accustomed to the use of pistols.

To all remonstrance about his gambling or other debts he had constantly affirmed that it would be 'all right;' that 'Old Sir Douglas' would pay them; and, with a spirit of exaggeration partly wilful, and partly arising from ignorance of all things in his uncle's affairs except the extreme readiness to assist himself which had always been displayed, he represented himself as nephew to a millionaire; and was indeed looked upon in the indolent and profligate circles he frequented, as related to a sort of Scotch prince; whose coffers overflowed with gold for which he had no better use than the pampering of his brother's son, the idol of his bachelor life and his eventual heir.

Half melancholy, and half provoked, Sir Douglas left his hotel for the lodging taken by his graceless favourite in one of the palazzos on the Chiaja. In the anteroom he found an Italian valet, smoking one of his master's cigars as he leaned carelessly from the window overlooking the Giardin' Reale; with no other occupation, apparently, than that of watching the swarming

crowd, whose ceaseless shouting and chattering form so strange a contrast to our own more silent and business-like population. The valet was extremely reluctant to admit Sir Douglas. 'Sua Eccellenza,'—as he termed Kenneth,—had gone to a masked ball, after the musical *soirée* at Lady Charlotte's; had only returned at daylight, and was not yet awake. But on receiving the explanation that the parties were related, and that he beheld before him that millionaire Milord of Scotland, of whose unexpected arrival even he had been told as of an important if not satisfactory event, he became as obsequious as he had been recalcitrant; begging his Excellency to walk into the other Excellency's apartment, when he would speedily wake the sleeping Excellency, and inform him of the illustrious Excellency's visit.

Sir Douglas got rid of the bowing valet, forbidding him to disturb his master. As he passed through Kenneth's bedroom, he paused and stood a few moments, with folded arms, leaning against the silk hangings and embroidered mosquito curtains of the luxurious bed, contemplating the sleeper. It was nearly noon, but the dim shadowy light from the Venetian blinds, broken by narrow

streaks of sunshine that seemed to quiver and ripple on the floor, as if reflected from the dazzling bay below,—could not disturb his slumbers. The wonderful likeness of Kenneth to his father, in that soft dreamy light, melted away the displeasure in Sir Douglas's heart. What to do with him, how to set matters right for him, and how to reform him, was his sole thought.

‘He is yet but young,’ sighed the uncle, as he passed into the sitting-room; where the open windows admitted at once the brilliant glow of a southern sun, and as much fresh air as Naples can boast in these quarters on the Chiaja. Little enough: since, all along that coast-built street, lingers a compound odour of stale fruit, church incense, tar, and fishing-nets; reeking beasts of burden, and the cheese and garlic of poverty-stricken and dirty lazzaroni.

In the principal sitting-room everything was in the same style of confused luxury as in the bedroom. Parisian fauteuils and sofas in handsome chintz covers,—hired in to assist the indolence of the occupant,—formed a strange contrast, and looked, as it were, doubly negligent, by the side of the faded splendour of the tight

and upright satin chairs and banquettes which formed the original furniture of the Palazzo; such furniture being indeed but sparsely supplied; the real owner making an arrangement very common in Italy—namely, letting the under and upper apartments, and inhabiting the principal floor himself. A quantity of little paper volumes of French romances, and a guitar, half-buried in sheets of music—some of it new, and some tattered and soiled and scribbled over—were the only symptoms of occupation, if we except two or three handsome pipes and an open box of cigars.

‘He is yet but young;’ and ‘Did I do right in sending him abroad?’ was doubtfully repeated in the mind of the perplexed uncle; not without a sorrowful consciousness that his own youth, and his own residence in various foreign countries, had been very differently spent, though *he* had had no friend or counsellor to guide and overlook him.

Absorbed in these reflections—looking out on the bright bay without seeing it, and scarcely conscious even of the shrill sound of multitudinous voices and ceaseless roll of vehicles in the streets below—it was not till young Kenneth laid a hand on his shoulder, and greeted him with a sort of

tired good-morrow, that Sir Douglas was even aware of his presence. Then the imprudent uncle plunged at once into all he had been ruminating over; all he had to say to the erring nephew. Warmly and rapidly he spoke—of Kenneth's extravagance, his drunkenness, his idleness, his debts; of the absolute necessity of his instantly selecting a profession, whether army, navy, law, or diplomacy; of the journey to Naples having been made in fear and trouble solely on his account (with a frank admission that Lorimer Boyd's friendly report had brought about that journey); of the determination Sir Douglas had come to, to tighten the reins, and so prevent the self-indulgent ruin of the young man who stood before him!

A man who rises after a late ball, and is thus suddenly set upon before he has even breakfasted, is not likely to be very patient; nor did either of the interlocutors come of a patient race. Kenneth's answers were full of that blind and boundless ingratitude which belongs to early youth. He refused to recognise in anything that had been done for him anything for which he had to be grateful; he utterly defied all authority; he could not see how Sir Douglas could assume to

exercise any. He, Kenneth, was Ross of Torrieburn, and Sir Douglas was Ross of Glenrossie—a richer man, that was all. Lorimer Boyd was an intolerable prig, and a meddlesome, treacherous idiot; and he, Kenneth, well knew to what cause he might attribute his uncalled-for interference.

He had little doubt (unless Sir Douglas had greatly mismanaged during his long minority) that his debts could be paid with the greatest ease: as to a profession, his father had no profession, and he himself desired nothing of the kind. He loved every inch of Torrieburn too well to go about the world like the Wandering Jew, as he considered Sir Douglas had done all his life, for no earthly reason. He had never asked, or wished, to come abroad,—but since he had come (by Sir Douglas's desire), he was determined to enjoy himself, and no earthly power should prevent him from doing so. As to the accusation of drunkenness, it was not true; and if he did occasionally get drunk, so did all the men he had ever known, either at college or since; and as to other temptations, he had infinitely greater temptations than other people, being handsomer, quicker-witted, and

more fitted for social enjoyment than ninety-nine men in a hundred; so that, though it was all very well for common-place fellows to be tied down to common-place rules, it wouldn't do for *him*, and he thought his uncle mad to expect it!

Finally, with a saucy toss of his handsome young head, and a look of defiance at land and sea, as he turned from the open window and dropped into one of the lounging arm-chairs preparatory to beginning his late breakfast, he advised Old Sir Douglas not to get into 'that humbugging way of lecturing' that comes upon men in later life, but to remember the days when he himself was young; when, doubtless, he indulged to the full in all that early harvest of fleeting pleasures of which he was now seeking to deprive his ill-used nephew.

Sir Douglas almost prefaced with an impatient groan the burst of passionate reply with which he met this tirade. 'In the first place,' he said, 'if *I* had made debts my father would not have cleared them, even had they been reckoned by hundreds instead of thousands, as I fear yours will be. In the next place, I had

a profession in which—whatever may be *your* opinion of its opportunities for pleasure—strict discipline, and the conduct of a gentleman, are imperative even in time of peace; and I am thankful to say that of those leisure times I saw but little.’

A proud, evanescent flush passed over the fine frank face as he spoke; and then he continued eagerly and sadly :

‘Oh! my dear Kenneth, do think there is something more to be done with life than merely to enjoy it! And, for God’s sake, don’t take the tone you have just taken with me, of that morbid selfish individuality that supposes its own temptations or advantages greater than those of other people. Take your place freely and frankly amongst them, without expecting too much, or thinking too highly of yourself, or offending by assumptions which they won’t recognise, and which only lead to quarrels. Depend upon it, there is no such thing upon earth, as a man so intensely superior to his fellow-men that he should stand exempt from common rules of conduct. God does not permit such gaps of distance among His creatures. He

gives to all, something ; and He gives to *none* the sort of superiority you would claim. "That faultless monster which the world ne'er saw," is a line from a true poet and philosopher. I know but one thing, Kenneth, in which you excel other men, and that is, that you are handsomer than most men ; but how far will that one advantage go, in this world ?'

'Well, a good way,'—muttered the youth, with a sulky smile, as he broke the shell of a second egg ;—'ask your wise friend Lorimer Boyd else.'

'My friend Lorimer Boyd may overvalue an advantage he has not, as you overvalue the advantages you have. Nevertheless he might please where you would not ; and most assuredly in the great race of life he would win where you would not. Whether you adopt, or refuse to adopt, a profession, you must (unless you retire to a hermitage) mingle with your fellow-men. To be admired, is an accident ; but to be beloved is in every one's power. You *must*, if you mean to be socially welcome, keep some prudence and decency in view ; you must be patient and respectful to some men, cordial and

even-tempered with others; and, above all, you must accept, in lieu of such foolish self-assertion as broke from you but now, the position which most certainly at times will be yours—namely, the finding yourself less gifted, less well informed, less worthy, and less esteemed, than some you consort with. I say *must*, because it is utterly impossible that any man should *always* be the first, foremost, and best, of every given group of men in which he finds himself for the time being.

‘And now, my dear boy, cease to pelt that plate with grape-skins, as though it were the author of my unwelcome lecture; and put on your hat, and do the honours of this lovely city to me; for, in spite of all my wanderings, I have never been here. And get me a list of your liabilities, that we may see what should be done. Torrieburn is not California, and even my willingness to aid you, does not extend so far as to be willing to transfer the rents of my estate into the pockets of foreign gamblers.

‘Tell me, too, something of your friends and friendships, here; since I am not entirely to rely on that honest arch-traitor my old school-


mate Lorimer Boyd. Tell me about the people we were with last night; on whom, indeed, we ought, or rather I ought, to go and leave a card this morning. And get back your smiles, Kenneth, as we walk along; for that is too clouded a brow for so clear a morning.'

The anxious heart hiding its anxiety under this assumed gaiety, touched the wayward young man more than the previous lecture. Kenneth wrung his uncle's hand with some confused expressions of mingled regret and deprecation; and he smiled too, (not a very comfortable or satisfactory smile), as they reached the arches of the villa on the heights beyond Santa Lucia, where Lady Charlotte Skifton and her daughter resided; murmuring to himself *sotto voce*, as he looked up at the green jalousies that shut out the sultry day from those familiar windows, 'Here, at least, I think I have the advantage over wise Mr. Lorimer Boyd.'

And with this ejaculation he followed Sir Douglas into the house.

CHAPTER V.

Feminine Character.

IR DOUGLAS ROSS was considerably startled when, on the drawing-room door being opened, in lieu of receiving the usual common-place and easy welcome accorded to morning visitors, he beheld Lady Charlotte sobbing bitterly in the depths of a very comfortable French *causeuse*, in which she was rather lying than sitting when the two gentlemen arrived. She lifted her embroidered handkerchief from her eyes for an instant, as if disturbed by their entrance, and then recommenced her weeping. The soft-eyed girl, who had sung the German 'Good-night' the previous evening, was standing by her chair, with an expression of mingled perplexity and sympathy; she murmured, 'Dear mamma, here

are friends,' in an expostulating tone; put out one hand shyly to greet Kenneth, (leaning with the other on the back of her mother's chair), and repeated the words, 'Here are friends.'

'Zizine! Zizine! Zizine!' sobbed Lady Charlotte.

'Mamma, Zizine will do very well; you will see she will do very well; I will attend to her myself.'

'How can you talk such nonsense, my dear Gertrude? I am sure she will die! Zizine! my poor little Zizine!'

Puzzled beyond measure, and wondering whether a little sister, grandchild, or favourite niece was the subject of lamenting, Sir Douglas made rather a stiff bow, and said hurriedly, 'We have come at a most unfortunate moment; I hope there is no serious cause of anxiety; we will call again later in the day.'

'Oh, no, no; oh, no, no; don't go away; don't leave me; I am sure Mr. Ross would not think of leaving me at such a time! He is always so friendly. Pray don't go—pray don't; it makes me worse, the idea of your going! It makes me worse!'

‘Mamma will be better presently,’ added the daughter, in a low vexed voice; and she glanced from Kenneth who was biting his lip to repress the dawn of one of his insolent smiles, and looked appealingly in the graver face of his uncle.

‘Can we do anything?’ asked the latter, kindly.

‘Oh, no! pray sit down. I will endeavour to be more composed—pray don’t go—no one *can* do anything; it is most afflicting; but don’t go. The fact is, Antonio has been so tormented by my English servants (and I am sure I would send every one of them away, sooner than Zizine should suffer), that he utterly refuses to stay with me. I offered him double what he engaged for as courier, but he won’t. He said, (it was so cruel of him!) he said,—and here a renewed burst of sobbing interrupted the explanation—‘that—that it was ridiculous to expect him to stay for the sake of a “*piccola bestia*” (that was what he called Zizine), when he was made quite *triste*, day and night, by the enmity of my servants. Now, you know, they have no enmity at all to him; only they don’t like him; and if he had any generosity he wouldn’t consider his own feelings

in the matter, but mine. Think what a goose he must be, to go and fret in that way about nothing. And Zizine will die; I know she will die!’

‘Who is Zizine?’ exclaimed Sir Douglas at last, with a little impatience in his voice.

He was answered by the soft-eyed girl; grave, embarrassed, hesitating, with downcast lids. ‘Zizine—Zizine—is a little Brazilian monkey, of which mamma is very fond.’

There was a moment’s pause; and then she added, ‘We are all fond of mamma’s pet. Mr. Ross knows Zizine.’

And with the last words, trifling as they appeared, the melodious voice seemed to grow severe, and the eyes that had been so timid turned so full and pained a look of reproach at Kenneth, that Sir Douglas was positively startled.

Not so Kenneth, whose repressed smile broke into a little mocking laugh. ‘Yes, I do know Zizine; and I will introduce her to my uncle, or, to speak more respectfully, I will introduce my uncle to her; and if she does not snap his fingers off, he shall feed and caress her, and console her for Antonio’s obduracy.’

‘ Oh, Mr. Ross,’ whimpered Lady Charlotte, ‘ how *can* you make a jest of anything so distressing ? I am sure if your good uncle knew all ! You are not aware, Sir Douglas, that this little creature—this precious little creature—will not eat unless fed by Antonio ! It will not take food from any other hand ; and what is to be done, if Antonio persists in leaving me, I am sure I don’t know ! I have been wretched about it all the morning !’

The shower of easy tears, after this last burst, seemed to clear off a little ; and the possessor of Zizine listened with a ray (or a rainbow) of hope to Sir Douglas’s assurances that a hungry monkey would take food from the most alien hand sooner than go without it ; and even ventured to hint that the valued Antonio himself must originally have been a stranger to Zizine, since she was brought from the Brazils. A remark which seemed to make a profound impression on Lady Charlotte, who pronounced it to be ‘ *so true ; so very true—* and—and so very comforting :’ and she was quite surprised it had never occurred to her before. ‘ But you know, Sir Douglas—Columbus’s egg—you know !’ And on seeing rather a puzzled ac-

quiescence in her new friend's face, she further explained herself by adding, 'What nobody thought of, till they saw it done, you know!' And with a tearful smile she gave a final flourish of the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, and settled herself for more cheerful discourse.

Then she listened with rapt attention to a number of little anecdotes told by Sir Douglas, of instinct and wisdom in animals, such as would be narrated to an intelligent child; and when he wound up with the tragic incident of the suicide from grief of a male marmoset, whose little mate dying on shipboard was thrown overboard; and told how, the very first day his cage was left accidentally open, the melancholy little survivor leaped over the ship's side at that identical spot, into the waves; and described the regret of all the sailors, who were of opinion that the ship should have been put about, though in wild weather, rather than that Jocko should have been allowed to perish,—Lady Charlotte vehemently exclaimed, 'Oh! I think so too—I think so too! How very cruel of the captain!'

And as she and her guests stepped forth into the garden and paced along the terrace, and

through the pergola shaded with vines, she remarked to Kenneth that she had never seen a more pleasant or gentlemanly man than his uncle — ‘and so *travelled*, too!’ which phrase she explained, like Columbus’s egg, and said she meant that he knew so many things, which, of course, he had picked up going so much about the world as she understood he had done.

And Gertrude, too, praised Sir Douglas, even to himself! She was leaning against one of the square stone supports of the loggia; the vine-leaves with their tendrils dropping and curling round her uncovered head; pausing to let her companion admire the distant view of land and sea. ‘It was very kind of you,’ she said, ‘to amuse mamma: it took away all her nervousness.’

Sir Douglas flushed a little. It was very pleasant being spoken to in such a friendly tone by this pretty girl; and he was rather shy, though his shyness was not awkward, like his friend Lorimer Boyd’s.

‘I was glad to amuse her. But you must not be angry with Kenneth for laughing a little: I had no idea it was a monkey that Lady Char-

lotte was so anxious about when I first saw her distress.'

Gertrude shrank a little farther from her companion, and spoke in a low voice.

'I know. I was not exactly angry; but it vexed me. Mamma is not—you will see at once that she is not—one of those clever women with strong nerves, who do nothing that any one can smile at. I know mamma is not clever; but she is good and tender; she is tender to all she loves; and she is tender to all creatures—birds, and pets of all kinds. My poor father used to give them to her. He died of consumption; and he used to have them in his room. It is true he did not give her Zizine, but mamma has the habit of loving these things extremely—and—and I cannot bear that any one should seem almost to jest at her vexation!'

She trembled a little as she spoke; but that trembling—like the *tremolo* in her clear, rich singing—gave no impression of weakness; and the touch of sternness was in her voice again at the final phrase, as it had been when she said that Kenneth 'knew Zizine.' Sir Douglas liked her for it. He liked the protection given by her

own child to this sacred, silly woman: sacred as a parent, even where weakness could not but be perceptible; sacred, for the sake of duty, and for the sake of scenes replete with sadness and reverent associations;—not to be laughed at by mocking lips; to be pitied; to be tenderly dealt with, even as she dealt, or was supposed to deal, with others. He felt that had he been the son of a silly mother, he also would have dealt so by her; and his own mother's half-remembered, half-forgotten face vaguely rose again to memory in presence of this girl, as it had done the evening before—leaving the impression, as it did then, that Gertrude Skifton 'had a look of her about the eyes.' Dear eyes, that bent over his cradle, and were lifted to heaven when he first learned to pray; and shone for a little way on in his childhood, and then vanished,—leaving in those childish years such a comfortless blank of love!

When he left the Villa Mandórlo with Kenneth, they walked a little way in silence; then Kenneth said, laughing, 'Well, we had a fine scene there! That woman is an incarnation of folly; but the girl is very nice.'

‘ Yes, the girl is nice,’ assented Sir Douglas.

‘ I’m glad you like her,’ said Kenneth, carelessly; ‘ for they are the only people (of your sort) I care to see here; and your friend, Lorimer Boyd, is in and out of their house like a tame dog. When he ain’t in the Chancellerie you may look for him in the Villa Mandórlo. I believe he means to take Lady Charlotte in hand, according to the advertisements, “To Ladies of Neglected Education.” He comes in like a tutor, with plans of Herculaneum, and drawings of Pompeian pottery, and tickets to see this, that, and the other, with most desperate industry.’

‘ And does Lady Charlotte respond?’

‘ Well, not unless some magnates are to accompany her. Her whole soul (if she has a soul) seems to be occupied with the ambition of being always in a certain “set,” wherever she goes. She is always triumphing in being invited, or lamenting that she and her daughter are “left out,” or setting some little wheel in motion to “get asked” somewhere. I believe she tolerates Lorimer Boyd (to whom she always listens with a stifled yawn) only as the well-spring and fountain of introductions she would not otherwise obtain

in this place. She dines constantly at the English Legation, and goes to balls at the Neapolitan Court, and knows all the Principessas, Duchessas, Contessas, and Contessinas that rattle their carriages up and down the Chiaja; and if the whole government were subverted (as it certainly will be one of these days), it is my belief that she would transfer her allegiance and her visiting-cards to whatever potentates floated on the surface, and to whatever dynasty happened to reign.'

'Well, it is an odd mania in a woman holding a certain and established rank herself, in her own country; but when you know more of the world, Kenneth, you won't think it so very uncommon. Are they rich?'

'Yes, I think they are. I believe' (and here Kenneth hesitated a little) — 'I believe the daughter has an independent fortune; and her mother is bent on marrying her to some foreign grandee. She very nearly managed it with one of the Roman Colonnas, or some such great family, before they came here; but his family wouldn't hear of it, the young lady being a Protestant.'

'I wonder Lady Charlotte would think of such a marriage!'

‘Think of it! I assure you she clung to it as if she were drowning; and as to the religious part of the difficulty, she said she really had hoped better things from the confessor of the family, who seemed such a *suave*, well-mannered, sociable man, than to oppose himself to her daughter; and she was sure Gertrude would not object to listen “occasionally” to his exhortations, or even to go “now and then, with her husband the prince,” to the great Church festivals; “but not as a customary thing; of course they could not expect that.” I really do think there never was such a goose born, as that woman!’

If Sir Douglas thought his conceited nephew severe, he did not find his rational friend, Lorimer Boyd, a whit more indulgent with respect to his new associates. All the craving after fine acquaintance and frivolous gaieties, and all the insane planning about her daughter, was confirmed in his report. ‘And the worst of it is,’ concluded Lorimer gloomily, ‘that she was once a great beauty.’

Sir Douglas laughed. ‘How does that add to her offence?’

‘By adding to her folly. She has all the

minauderies and airs of a silly beautiful girl, being now but a silly elderly woman. I could box her ears when I see her drooping her faded thin little cheek to her skeleton shoulder ; with a long ringlet of heaven-knows-who's hair in the fashion of a lovelock, trailing over her scragginess. She always reminds me of some figure in Holbein's "Dance of Death." A most preposterous woman.'

'Her daughter seems very different, and very fond of her, Lorimer. There must be some good in her, depend upon it.'

'I suppose there is *some* good in every one. Her daughter—well! we see what bright freshness of vegetation springs up in tropic dust; what flowers burst through the crevices of those hot, barren walls. Poor child, half her time is spent in endeavouring not to seem ashamed of her mother!'

'No; she loves her mother,' exclaimed Sir Douglas, eagerly.

'She must have a great deal of love to spare,' said Lorimer Boyd, with something between a sigh and a sneer; 'and if it be so, it says much for the daughter, but nothing for the mother. Gertrude Skifton is like her father. I knew

him : he died here. A man to love and to remember.'

' Well, you must not dispute with my wise uncle,' laughed Kenneth, ' for he sets up to know more of these people in two days, than those who have sat,—as we have,—for two months, within hail of Lady Charlotte's one ringlet almost every evening.'

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CHAPTER VI.

How Acquaintance Ripens.

ALMOST every evening!' It is astonishing how rapidly intimacy progresses in country-houses, sea-side gatherings, and the small society of compatriots in a foreign town. If you know each other at all, it is almost impossible not to be what is called 'intimate;' even though that degree of familiarity may lessen, or cease altogether, when the circumstances which produced it are altered; and when persons who were 'great friends' at Rome, Naples, or Florence, choose to drop into being civil acquaintances, after they once more carelessly congregate with the herding swarms of London.

Lady Charlotte and her daughter Gertrude were the chief stars at Naples of many a pic-nic party and ball. Not that Gertrude was a great

beauty, or her mother a wise woman, as we have seen; but because they were among the few well-connected English then in Naples; and the 'set,'—as Lady Charlotte called it,—with the addition of what was best of the 'foreign set,' mingled and met nearly every day in pursuit of the same aim—pleasure. The English are said to hold aloof from each other abroad; and there is a humorous passage at the opening of Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey,' where he represents himself as meeting with a gentleman-like and conversible person, of whose chance companionship he was about to avail himself, but, *finding he was a compatriot*, he retired to his own room.

Whatever may have been the case in Sterne's time, it is certain that the disposition now is rather the reverse. And though we hear of ladies in India, and officers' wives in regiments on foreign service, 'flouting' each other in their own small circle: and, in colonial society, of ladies whom 'nobody in the colony visits:' and everywhere of the various little monkey-copyings of exclusiveness, performed by the Zizines who give themselves airs abroad—'captains' ladies,' and 'majors' ladies,' 'colonels' ladies,' and 'governors'

ladies;' and 'white ladies' who won't associate with 'brown ladies;' and Creoles, and Mestas, and all sorts of other distinctions unknown to the great European family—yet, in a general way, the English are a sociable nation; and, beyond a certain cautious shyness as to the 'respectability' of new acquaintances, there is no reluctance to come together.

But Lady Charlotte was of Scotch extraction, and the Scotch are yet more willing to 'foregather,' as it is called, provided it be with their 'own folk.' They are a scantier population than the English, with a scantier aristocracy and gentry. The tide of commercial success has not yet so flooded in among them (though it is fast advancing) as it has amongst the English; sweeping away old feudal memories and landmarks. They know all about each other's families and 'forbears,' down to the twentieth degree of cousinhood; and both rich and poor, high and low, genteel and ungentleel, set a value on rank and connexion far beyond the value set upon it in England, and set a value on their own nationality, which is a feeling distinct and apart. 'Come of gude Scotch bluid' is a far greater recommendation among them, than 'come

of a good old county family' is among the Southrons; and when that 'gude stock' is also noble, the respect is unbounded. That

'Caledonia, stern and wild,'

which made so rough a nurse to poetic Burns, admits, *as a theory*, his noble line—

'A man's a man for a' that;'

but, as a matter of practice, it is certain that if her wayward gauger had been a lord—if he had been a duke—if he had even been a laird—'Burns of Burndyke'—she would not have delayed the opportunity to *fêter* his genius till it became a centenary festival!

Lady Charlotte was a Scotchwoman; and she was glad to meet Lorimer Boyd and friends 'from the North.' She had even sought to establish a cousinhood between herself and Lorimer on the strength of some intermarriage between the Clochnabens and her own family in very remote times. And, at all events, she held him bound and responsible for her destiny in Naples; for fit introductions and pleasant days. He had been very kind, she said, when Mr. Skifton was dying; 'read to him, and that sort of thing;' and very

A little soreness consequent on this position, and a wavering puzzled notion that such circumstances had weighed more with her recalcitrant foreign grandees than Gertrude's religion, troubled Lady Charlotte's mind. She had been rather humbled and annoyed at the escape from her very simple web of the young Colonna; and previous to Sir Douglas's arrival she had already been occupying herself with little fooleries and flatteries to Kenneth, who, *faute de mieux*, would, she thought, make a good husband for Gertie (in *her* view of a good husband), being well off himself and heir to Old Sir Douglas. Her efforts however, being confined to what chaperons call 'bringing the young people together,' and the encouragement of much singing of Scotch ballads in alternation with more cultivated music, she did neither good nor harm; and that is more than can be said of the majority of match-making or match-hoping mothers.

Neither was she, in fact, very anxious about it; for, after all, either here or elsewhere, some great duke, prince, or count, might suddenly fall in love with her daughter; and she *might* wish *that* instead of Mr. Ross; and it would be very

embarrassing to have to 'throw over' Kenneth, and not very ladylike.

So things were suffered to take pretty much their own course; and a very pleasant course it was for all parties. Lorimer Boyd was as friendly as possible, and Kenneth exceedingly attentive, though now and then he teased Lady Charlotte by little mockeries and *persiflage* which she only half understood, and feebly rebutted; and Sir Douglas, 'in his way' was charming too. Lady Charlotte took great pains to please him; and never felt uneasy with him as she did occasionally with his nephew. She had just prudence enough 'in case it ever came to anything between Kenneth Ross and Gertie,' to avoid all allusion to her knowledge that the nephew was thought very wild. It would be very foolish to set his rich uncle against him, and *all* young men ran a little wild at his age, and abroad. And she used to try a little feeble flattery with Sir Douglas—her head very much to one side, and her slender fingers twirling that long young ringlet which she had made sole inheritor of her own departed love-locks, and which kept Lorimer Boyd in a chronic state of dissatisfaction. Modulating her voice to a sort of

singing whisper, like a canary-bird at sunset, she ventured little hints of admiration as to his looks; and how he must 'have been' much handsomer than Kenneth; and she bantered him about his 'dreadful bravery' and his probable relationship to the 'Parliament Captain,' the Ross of 1650, and talked of the taking of Montrose, and made Gertrude repeat a stanza that she 'saw in an old book, but what book it was, had gone out of her poor head,' —

' Leslie for the kirk,
And Middleton for the king;
But de'il a man can gie a knock
But Ross and Augustine!'

But it was when Brazilian Zizine fell ill ('like a fellow-creature,' as Lady Charlotte expressed it) that Sir Douglas's favour rose to its climax! He actually gravely inspected Zizine; he brought remedies, and seemed to pity the little dumb beast; and he talked to Gertrude of its 'plaintive captivo eyes,' while he fed it. And Lady Charlotte was overheard saying of him, in most unintelligible Italian to the Contessa Rufo, that 'Avendo potuto essere uno generale, nondimeno aveva guarito

Zizine !' on which the pretty Contessa, with a warm Southern smile, pronounced Sir Douglas to be 'tanto amabile !' though she had not the remotest idea what meaning her friend wished to convey, or what the possibility of his becoming a general had to do with his feeding a monkey.

His tenderness, however, to Zizine, was not all. He amused Lady Charlotte ; who declared that talking to him was 'like sitting with the Arabian Nights.' 'No, Mr. Kenneth need not laugh ; for of course she did not mean that she could sit with the Arabian Nights,—or with any other stories ; but he knew well enough that what she really meant was, that his uncle told them so many pleasant things.' She had daily driven up and down the Chiaja till she was weary, and daily inspected what Gertrude called the 'playthings' at their pretty villa : playthings of which all Italians are very fond. Strange slender bridges over artificial streamlets ; garden traps that when trodden on send a sprinkling shower over the head of the startled visitor ; grottoes, and gilt gazebos, and Chinese summer-houses, and thatched rustic lodges. But she had not seen the graver sights of Naples, as a dowager who had more ac-

quaintance with history or even with Murray's guide-books might have done: so that much novelty cropped and budded out of the old places, in consequence of being with the new companionable friend.

People see things under such different aspects! When Stendahl published his 'Rome, Naples, and Florence, in 1817,' all that he chose to describe in his opening pages—whether the better to mask subsequent expressions of political opinions, or from any other motive—was the eagerness with which he flew to the theatres, and what operas were performed at the various cities he visited during his tour. His account of his first entrance into Milan is, that he immediately went to La Scala; and his description of Naples is confined to the fact, that San Carlo being shut, he rushed to the Fiorentini. He mentions that 'two play-houses have been discovered at Pompeii, and a third at Herculaneum;' and as to the beauties of nature he disposes of them in his diary thus:—
'25 Février. Je reviens de Pæstum. *Route pittoresque.*'

An English lady who had arrived by sea at Lisbon sent her coachman and lady's maid to

amuse themselves with the sights of the new foreign city. The coachman returned filled with melancholy contempt for the inferior 'turn out' of the Portuguese nobility as to carriages and harness: the lady's-maid said she (like Stendahl) had been to the opera, and thought the ladies' necks were in general far too short (though they wore some fine necklaces), and that their inclination to *embonpoint* was very remarkable; figures, indeed, that she 'would have no pleasure in dressing.'

Sir Douglas's mode of seeing Naples might be no better than that of his neighbours, but it had the merit of entertaining Lady Charlotte Skifton. He was full of 'historical gossip;' to which she used to listen most attentively, pulling the young ringlet nearly straight, and looking round as if she vaguely expected to see the people and events he conjured up. She 'could not eat her dinner for thinking of young Conradin—titular king of Sicily from the time he was two years old till he was sixteen,—and then, (at that boyish age!) led out to execution in the market-place with his uncle Frederic of Austria; Pope Urban having aided Charles of Anjou to defeat and take him prisoner.

She implicitly believed the doubtful story of his mother sailing into the Bay of Naples with black sails to her ships, and untold treasure as ransom, too late to rescue her murdered and courageous boy. She was 'afraid she was almost glad' at the increased hatred of the French which that execution inspired, till in the rolling course of years, at a certain Easter, 1282, every Frenchman in Sicily, except one, was murdered.


She thought Queen Joanna's conduct 'really now so *very* abominable,' twisting a silk cord of variegated colours, and answering her inquisitive husband that it was 'to strangle him with,' so playfully that he believed she was joking till the horrible threat came true. She was delighted to hear that Queen Joanna was herself smothered afterwards, after many more years of crime, and she looked at the dark, gaping windows of her ruined palace in the Bay, with awe and satisfaction.

As to Massaniello, and his rebellion and brief triumph—she said she 'knew all about *him*'—except that the people had sewed his head again to his body, and obliged the Government to give him a state burial after his downfall and massacre,

—‘because she had seen the opera of *Massaniello* several times: only in the opera there was nothing about what happened after he was killed.’

Newer to her was the hanging of Admiral Caraccioli (that blot upon the fame of Nelson!), and the well-attested story of the body of the Italian admiral floating upright, to the consternation of the sailors, in the wake of Nelson’s ship, from the imperfect weighting down of the corpse when flung into the sea.

Her interest as to the disputed fact whether Pozzuoli was the place where St. Paul landed, was weak to the absorbed attention with which she devoured the details of the murder of Agrippina by order of her own son, the Emperor Nero. The picture of this proud, profligate, energetic old woman, betrayed into a galley contrived like those in the time of the French *Noyades*, to give way and sink under her,—her escape, after being hit on the head by a slave with an oar; her floating, swimming, and struggling, to the shore at Baia, and being taken to her own Lucrine villa only to be afterwards assassinated in her bed there,—had a fascination not unmixed with a sensation of terror, for Lady Charlotte,—moving



calculations, as to general debts; and debts of 'honour;' loans made (half from careless generosity, half from vanity) to idle young foreigners, who had no earthly claim upon his assistance; jewellery squandered on their female associates; and all the embarrassments from which,—had he probed his own heart for the truth,—he expected to be relieved by the very simple expedient of getting his uncle to 'pay them off.'

Nothing is more curious, in these cases of extravagance, than the puppy-blindness which does not see,—in that first stage of manhood,—that if such debts are 'paid off' by some relative or friend,—the items of which they were composed were acts of meanness, and not acts of generosity. If the phrases usual on such occasions were put into the language of the pleasant old story of the '*Palais de la Vérité*,'—where people said, not what they intended to say, but spoke the 'naked truth,'—how very extraordinary those sentences would sound!

Conceive a man addressing his friend thus:

'My dear fellow, certainly, I will lend you a couple of hundreds. I'll give you all my three sisters' music-lessons, new dresses, and

jaunts to the sea-side for this year. And there's pale little Fanny, who costs my mother a good deal in physicians' advice. I'll give you all her doctors' fees for six months or so, and she shall go without. I would not be so stingy as to refuse a friend such a paltry sum as you have asked of me,—no, not for the world.'

Such language may sound startling and absurd; but it is a true paraphrase and reduction of the flourish of words in which similar boastful offers are made by young men to the greedy companions of their follies. Neither borrower nor lender appear the least conscious that the fund they draw upon consists of what they can *crib* from others.

So much for a specimen of lending to a friend. Here is the liberal gift to a lady:—

'I made little Justerini the dancer such a splendid present last Christmas! I gave her three years of my fat old father's plodding work as head-clerk with Tightenall and Co.! He's getting old, you know: drowsy of an evening: tired out, in fact: had rather a hard life of it; a good many of us to provide for. But I was determined I'd give her the earrings. I'd have given double,—

ay, six years of his hard-earned salary, sooner than not have behaved handsomely to her about them! *Such a darling, that girl is!*'

Are there not many old gentlemen who still plod on for their families, when they would fain rest—and ought to rest—who can endorse the truth of this translation?

Then there is the 'free and open-handed' young man, who will go 'share and share alike' in anything, from a Greenwich dinner to a New-market cottage. *He speaks:—*

'I can't stand a fellow refusing his chum such a paltry favour as belonging to a club, or sharing a yacht, or taking half an opera-box with him. I know *I* didn't hesitate a minute when Tom Osprey asked *me*. I gave him my mother's carriage-horses, and little Sam's favourite pony, and my father's hunters, and that box at Twickenham where they used to go for change of air in summer,—before Tom had half done explaining about it. *I'm* not one of your backward fellows. I always come forward like a man; when a friend wants anything.'

Or thus; liberal only to Self, instead of Self and Co.

‘I always say there are certain things a fellow can’t do without. *Must* make a certain figure, and have certain comforts. *I* like to enjoy life; and see other fellows enjoy it. Life is not worth having if you don’t put some pleasure into it! I was obliged to have all my old grandmother’s sables and shawls last winter,—(you know she brought me up; my mother was too poor to do it);—besides the marriage-portion she had put by for my Cousin Bessie. Couldn’t do without, I assure you; not, at least, so as to live like a gentleman. Can’t see why Cousin Bessie should be in any hurry about marrying; or why the confounded prig she’s engaged to, makes such a point of what he calls “mutual means of support.” All I know is, I couldn’t do without her portion and grandmother’s Indian shawls and Russian sables; that’s fact.’

Or even thus. Among a set where shawls, and sables, and marriage-portions, are alike unknown.

‘You say you wonder, because I’m a poor curate’s son, how I can get on at college? That’s all you know about it! Of course it is difficult; and I’m put to it to give wine-parties and so forth, like other fellows—but it’s to be done with

proper management. If I take six days in the week butcher's meat that my brothers and sisters would eat; and all the coals and blankets the old women in the village used to get,—and my father's two glasses of port-wine which my mother fancied kept his throat from relaxing for Sunday duty,—and a year or two of Dick's schooling, (who scarcely needs it, for my father gives him all his spare time, and he's a sharp fellow by nature,) it comes to a good lump of money in the end; and, if there's still some debt left, I've no doubt I can grind it out of them, sooner than seem shabby to these fellows at Oxford.'

Ah! how many a true tragedy lies under this apparent farce of words! How many a 'fine-spirited young gentleman, very free with his money,' steps out of his hotel in the sight of admiring waiters, drawing on a pair of straw-coloured gloves in preparation for a day's pleasure—tossing double his real fare to the cabman to be driven rapidly to the place of rendezvous: and then talks to the boon-companions he joins, it may be, of poachers on his father's estate; of some servant of his own, turned away as an

idle vagabond and a thief for taking his master's cigars and silk-handkerchiefs; of 'being regularly swindled out of his money' by some Bond Street jeweller, who according to custom has sold him a set of studs and a gold ring for treble their real value; but to whom it never once occurs that the *tu quoque* of these various accusations would be his own just due!

That he, also, is an idle vagabond, living on what he never earned; a 'poacher' on the better means of better men;—a 'swindler' in the acquirement of things unpaid for, or the profitable interest on which is lost, in the uncertainty and delay of payment;—yea, it may be, a most daring 'ROBBER,' whose 'stand and deliver' threatens even more than the lives of those whose substance has to be surrendered to him; since it threatens disgrace and ruin to himself (and through him to all connected with him) if they do not suffer themselves to be stripped of their goods, and consent to the extremity of sacrifice!

And fathers may toil, and mothers may darn, and many a Bessie pine, and many a Fanny sicken for sea-air, and many a little Dick lose

his schooling: and so long as the cause of all these troubles does not actually pick pockets in the streets; or garotte unwary passengers on the highways and byeways where business or pleasure calls him; he contentedly believes himself to be living the life of 'a gentleman and an honest man,' and would knock the offender down who dared to dispute that position.

Kenneth Ross doubted as little of his title to be thought 'a thorough gentleman,' as others of his creed. And yet it is certain that he expected his friends, his tradesmen, his gambling debts, and his follies, to be paid for out of his uncle's money; was perfectly content that all his vicarious acts of generosity should (like his debts) be set down to his own credit, but in truth be provided for by this other man; and had never given a single thought as to what his situation, or the situation of his motley crowd of creditors would be, should his own means fall short, and his uncle, wearied out at last, refuse to supply the deficit.

But why should he give it a thought? Was he not his uncle's heir? He knew he was to be his heir. At least he had always expected

it, ever since he was a child ; and he believed Sir Douglas had always intended it.

Yes, Sir Douglas certainly *had* intended it. Up to a certain evening—the evening of a day of glory and beauty and sunshine spent in an expedition to Sorrento—he had intended it ; though he did not know that Kenneth built upon it. And the first night which saw him waver in such intentions, saw him also wakeful, weary, and tender ; full of yearnings to his nephew ; and occupied even until early dawn with anxious repetitions in his own mind of wise counsel and explanation ; though both counsel and explanation were to make it clear to Ross of Torrieburn, that Ross of Glenrossie was assisting him for the last time !

The worst of it was, that Torrieburn's past experience was very much against any settled belief in such a declaration as to Glenrossie's future proceedings.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Day at Sorrento.

AS the lovely Italian spring advanced, the question, 'What shall we do to-morrow?' was answered more and more boldly; and the little intimate circle that had mingled with royal balls, and musical routs, during more wintry weather (for even Naples has its winter); and whose members had availed themselves of Italian hospitalities; began to draw more and more together; seeking, as strangers naturally would, their chief pleasure in excursions among scenes the beauty of which will for ever be described in vain in guide-books, itineraries, and travels,—since not all the glowing words that ever were strung together can convey a hundredth part of the impression made on the senses by actual experience. It is a favourite

phrase with poets, that we should 'conjure up a vision' of such and such objects; but no magic can conjure up, to one who has never yet beheld Southern Italy, the sudden irradiation of our common world that takes place. It is the nature we always knew—but it is nature illuminated! Colour is deeper and brighter, seas are more dazzling, sunrise and sunset are inconceivably richer, mountains have gradations of purple which no pencil can translate. The wasteful wealth of fruit and flowers sets us dreaming of Eden, instead of our digging and delving climes; and the very people who dwell in these favoured regions seem endowed with a quicker life. Eyes have a depth of shining, and teeth a glitter in smiling, and cheeks a warmth of glowing, that the north can never show. Like Wilson's cloud, in the Isle of Palms, of which he says,—

'E'en in its very motion there was rest,'

even in their very indolence there is passion! And that *dolce far niente*, of which we hear so much and understand so little, is more like the tranquillity of their own slumbering volcanoes,

than the settled calm which alone among us would produce it. Or—to take the less grandiose simile of Lorimer Boyd in discussing the subject with Sir Douglas—it is the difference between the contented grazing of the bovine race, and the sleek and sleepy yawning of the hunting leopard. There is real quiet in the one; there is only temporary inaction in the other.

And though the simile might not be over-complimentary, Lorimer Boyd loved the Italians. He praised their simplicity; the absence of affectation, the loving nature of their women. He denied the inferiority of their men. He held that all of best and brightest in Europe came originally from Italy. He counted over the roll of the old heroic names, and came down, with an excuse for every blotted entry in history, to those later times when even her artists had fought as soldiers, and her priests governed as statesmen. He would not admit, without opposition, even Sir Douglas's censure of the Neapolitan nobility. What could be expected of men who were only too well aware that Government had no feeling towards such as might be marked for distinction, but that of

jealousy? Take away the occupation of literature and politics, freedom of action, and great landed interests, from the youthful nobility of Great Britain; take away their natural stake in the prosperity of their country; and what would remain, even for them, but the pursuit of pleasure, and the driving on of aimless days?

Besides, Naples was not Italy. In that often taken and retaken town, there was scarcely a nation whose blood did not mingle with the original race. French and Spanish, German and English, Greek, and even Turkish currents are in those idle veins. And because Kenneth had found a set of profligates and gamblers there—as he could have found a set of idlers and gamblers in Paris or in London—was Sir Douglas to pass a sweeping judgment over the land, or attribute to the aristocracy of Naples any increase in his anxieties respecting his wayward nephew? As well might he consider it the fault of the fishermen in the islands of Ischia or Procida.

Those anxieties, however, were perpetually haunting Sir Douglas; so much so that once or twice he let fall a word respecting his hope that Kenneth 'would make creditable friendships'

even to Gertrude,—recurring eagerly to his own love, in youth and boyhood, for Lorimer Boyd.

And Gertrude looked grave, and said, ‘I know what you feel. I had once a brother.’

Sir Douglas asked Lorimer about this brother. He had known them all. Did he resemble Gertrude?

‘No. He was exactly like his most ridiculous mother, clothed in a tail-coat instead of female habiliments—if possible even more silly, more vain, and certainly less well-tempered; and it was anything but a subject of regret that he had pre-deceased his father, for he would have been a plague instead of a protection to his mother and sister.’

‘How old do you suppose Miss Skifton may be? She is very grave and staid for a girl.’

‘She is two-and-twenty. I know her age. And she has seen much of life and its cares even for those years.’ And Lorimer Boyd sighed.

Sir Douglas mused on her tone and look when she said, ‘I had once a brother;’ and on a hundred other instances which impressed his memory, though they seemed mere nothings. There are persons who talk much and readily of their feel-

ings, and who yet leave you in uncertainty both as to the sincerity and the motive of their confession ; and there are others whose rare allusions to themselves and their private joys or sorrows seem to come like gleams of light, showing their whole inner nature.

Sir Douglas would have been at a loss to explain why the little he had ever gleaned from Gertrude Skifton respecting herself, had filled him with such intense sympathy and approval ; such a conviction that her character was one of mingled gentleness and strength ; fondness and girlish dignity ; reserve and a subdued eagerness which pleased him better than all the open enthusiasm in the world !

He loved in her the cherishing of her foolish mother ; the adoration for her dead father's memory ; her easy courtesy to strangers ; her sweet frank friendliness with those whom she acknowledged as intimates ; with Kenneth, and Lorimer Boyd, and——himself. This last admission Sir Douglas made with a little hesitation. Her welcome to him was shyer than her welcome to them. Well, he would not have had it otherwise—she had not known him so long ; and he remembered

with pleasure the beautiful blush which overspread her face once when she said, 'I do not feel that you are so much of a stranger as I should; because Mr. Lorimer Boyd used to read your letters aloud sometimes, when you were in India, to my poor father; indeed, very often he used to read us one; my father enjoyed them so.'

The expression of her countenance was always lovely; lovely when her eyes were downcast (as indeed was habitual with her), and lovely when she slowly raised them, as she did on this occasion, with a sort of innocent appeal in them, as though they said, 'I know I am blushing, but it is not for anything of which I need feel ashamed.'

He thought of her perpetually; and settled in his own mind that there was not in her one iota that he could wish to see altered, or that could be changed for the better.

And Lady Charlotte was quite pleased with his evident approval, for she felt 'if ever it came to anything between Kenneth Ross and Gertie,' here would be one great step gained for all subsequent arrangements.

And now they were to have one of their customary holidays, and spend the whole bright day

at Sorrento : the little smiling Contessa Rufo, and a German couple, to whom she was 'doing the honours' of the sights of Naples, being the only strangers of the party.

Lady Charlotte got but one scanty story from Sir Douglas (the death of Pliny, which she declared she had never heard before) ; and then she chatted with the Contessa, her companions being absorbed in the beauty of the moving panorama before them. They had left Naples at an hour unknown to indolent Londoners, and the early glory of morning yet fell on the tideless sea as they wound through the narrow roads surmounting the Bay of Castellamare ; dotted with pointed white sails like wings, and showing on its rippled surface those strange dappled patches of green and purple which vary the blue of the ocean whenever it nears the shore.

Lovelier and lovelier grew the scene as they proceeded onwards. In odd nooks of the lofty cliffs, nestled houses as white as those distant sails ; fruit-trees and vines surrounded them ; gay foliage mantled the rocky ledges ; and here and there the eye could rest on the glistening tops of thickly-planted orchards of orange and lemon-

trees, looking like rounded domes of emerald, clustering far down in the hollows.

Fig-trees, with their broad black leaves, and vines in tender transparent green, mocked the grey volcanic ruggedness of the lofty rocks, as they came in sight of Sorrento. Little rude staircase-like paths straggled downwards to the caverns and coves of the beach, inviting the feet to explore them. Groups of fishermen, with women and children, loitered and basked here and there, clothed in those bright vestments in which all southern people delight. Now and then echoes of laughter, or the fragment of a simple song, came floating up on the air with that wonderful distinctness with which sounds are heard along a rocky shore,—airs which Gordigiani's exquisite setting have since made famous ; and which, perhaps, it required that composer's fine and sensitive taste to strip from their ruggedness as we strip off the shell of the almond, denuding the veiled melodies from nasal and husky tones, and sending them forth to the world full only of such gentle passion as breathes in the 'Bianco visin,' and the 'Tempo Passato;' familiar to us now from many a sweet and tutored voice even in our own land.

Lorimer Boyd had known Gordigiani's daughter. He described that sweet, ethereal creature to Gertrude: her large spiritual eyes, like the eyes we imagine those of a guardian angel; her smile, faint and tender as the serenest twilight; her pretty bashful pride in being able to compose words to her father's music. But she was gone—passed away like the echo of her own songs—taken in the early prime of her sweetness, scarcely living even to the time indicated by the poetic French epitaph written on one almost as lovely:—

‘Rose, elle a vecu ce que vivent les Roses,
L’espace d’un jour!’

They were still talking of this young Italian and her genius; and Sir Douglas was murmuring to himself the Scriptural words,—‘When the ear heard her, it blessed her,’—less with any thought of Gordigiani's angel-daughter, or a yet fitter reference to ‘works of necessity, piety, and charity,’ than in remembrance of the tremulous contralto of the English girl at his side,—when a wild shriek, followed by that wonderful amount of exclamatory appeals to Madonnas and Saints of different altars, common among the Italians, startled them into attention.

The carriages were to meet them at a given point, and they had been traversing part of their road upon mules; Gertrude riding by her mother, till they had paused to gaze at the town and beach; falling then a little into the rear with Lorimer and Sir Douglas while speaking of Gordigiani's music. The Rufos with their friends came next; and Kenneth and Lady Charlotte were a little in advance.

Lady Charlotte was in high spirits, replying to Kenneth's constant *persiflage* with more *à plomb* than usual; pricking her mule from time to time with the coral points of her white silk parasol, and laughing foolishly like a school-girl at any little difficulties in the route. Presently the mule suddenly stopped. 'Oh, you obstinacy, won't you take me on 'cause I'm such a giddy thing?' giggled the rider, giving a final prod at the mule's ear with the ornamented parasol.

The steel of the light parasol snapped; the sharp end entered the ear of the animal, which swerved, put its head down, and set off at a pace anything but safe or pleasant in poor Lady Charlotte's opinion. All the other mules, accustomed to act in concert with parties of sight-seers, set

off at a like pace. Lady Charlotte screamed, the guides shouted, and a perfect Babel of voices sent up prayers to heaven for protection, mingled with curses of the poor beast on earth. Kenneth at first leaned back in his saddle in a fit of inextinguishable laughter at the ridicule of the whole scene. Fat Count Rufo, pulling in vain at the hard mouth of his *monture*, and bounding in his saddle like an india-rubber ball; his pretty countess laughing also, as she careered along, flying past Kenneth with her ankles much more exposed than at the decent commencement of her ride; the German couple, also at full speed, looking helplessly at each other as they fled together like the hapless pair in Bürger's *Leonora*; and Lady Charlotte, the primary cause of all this erratic disturbance, making involuntary *soubresauts* on and off her frightened mule, such as are performed by light and nimble professionals for the entertainment of the audience at Astley's.

But all laughter was merged in fear, when the mule made a false step on a path close to the precipice, that crumbled beneath its tread; then scrambled to recover its footing, unseating Lady Charlotte in the operation, and dragging her a few

yards, pinned by many folds of careful shawling, and therefore utterly unable to extricate herself.

Before the sharp, bitter shriek from Gertrude had died thrillingly on the air, the gentlemen of the party had reached the poor frightened woman, and rescued her from further danger. Sir Douglas had been first; leaping from his mule which he suffered to roam at large, and not attempting the dangerous experiment of riding after her. They were close to Sorrento; close to the Hotel di Tasso, where already rooms and refreshments had been ordered, in anticipation of their arrival. Lady Charlotte was easily carried there, and laid, half-fainting from fright and shock—but not otherwise the worse of her Mazeppa-like career—on a *chaise longue* in one of the bedrooms.

Kenneth helped to carry her in, and with a returning smile congratulated Gertrude on her mother's safety. Gertrude smiled too, vaguely, with a confused tearful look at Kenneth, in acknowledgment of being spoken to; rather than as hearing the exact words; and then Kenneth Ross retreated, to compliment and re-assure pretty Countess Rufo, and Gertrude knelt down by her mother. Sir Douglas was still arranging pillows

and shawls. If he had been waiting upon the venerable and unfortunate Queen Amélie of France, he could not have attended to her with more tender respect. He paused, and looked down on her as she lay. Gertrude's mother! That useless—ineestimable life! As he paused, the kneeling girl looked up at him; she voluntarily extended her hand to clasp his. 'Oh! I thank you so!' was all she said.

The warmth of the sun, when it glitters through rain in those warm southern climes when the rapid storms are over, and the red geranium and pale violet take glory from its rays—what was it to the warmth of Gertrude's eyes, shining through their haze of agitated tears! Her gaze thrilled the heart of him she addressed; his hand trembled as it pressed hers; that white hand with its modelled fingers—

'Lovely tapering less and less,'

whose graceful and nimble passage over the notes of the piano he had so often watched in the accompaniments to her welcome songs. He blessed her mentally for the eager movement which had so given it, warm and gloveless, into his cordial

grasp; and whether after that sudden clasping it was dropped by him, or withdrawn by her, he was made too giddy by such contact to remember.

It must have been withdrawn; for one spectator, whom both had forgotten—Lorimer Boyd—passed *his* hand over his brow with a sense of pain, and muttered—‘She is in love with Douglas!’

In love. For no girl ‘in love’ would leave her hand to be clasped, as friendship only, with its firm light satisfied hold, should clasp it,—if that electric thrill which flashes love’s messages from heart to heart told her she either loved or was beloved. Let us then believe, for Sir Douglas’s sake, that the white hand was withdrawn, and that the trembling downcast look with which Gertrude listened to his further reassurances (made in rather a different voice from usual), as to Lady Charlotte’s condition, resulted rather from tender embarrassment than from any lingering misgiving as to her mother’s danger.

Lady Charlotte had indeed sustained no hurt. Her extreme fragility and slenderness had caused her to fall so lightly, that not a bruise was discoverable beyond a little abrasion on one of her wrists; and the quantity of soft shawls of very

rich texture, slipping with her as she fell, made a sort of cradle for her head and shoulders during the brief interval of risk, when she was dragged along the path by the rocks.

‘But it *might* have been very serious ; I *might* even have been killed, mightn’t I ?’ she repeated over and over again, not without a little feeling of pleasure at having been the heroine of so dangerous an adventure. And as often as Gertrude assented, and pressed her lips on the faded face, with—‘It might, indeed, my poor little mother !’ so often did Lady Charlotte, with a sort of cooing murmur of pity for herself, assiduously smooth and twine round her finger *the* ringlet, which had been made terribly dusty and unsightly during the *culbute* of its possessor, and had required more than ordinary care to restore it to form and brightness.

The Hotel di Tasso overhangs the sea, and on that side at least there is comparative silence. Lady Charlotte, therefore, wearied by her inauspicious ride, and lulled by the sound of gently-lapping waves far beneath the windows, and by the heat of the afternoon sun, carefully as it was shut and shaded from her, soon fell fast asleep. For a short interval

Sir Douglas and Gertrude remained motionless, listening to her measured slumberous breathings. Then he proposed to her daughter to come out, to join the rest of the party, who had already braved both heat and fatigue, and clambered to the Capo di Sorrento: and they sallied forth, not unwilling to enjoy their walk according to the implication conveyed in that sweet Irishism, 'alone together,' the '*presque seule*' of the pretty French widow, who was asked if she was going 'alone' into the country.

And now all again was gladness, and all again was bloom and beauty; wild flowers sparkled along the shore, even to the very verge of Neptune's domain. On the lovely headland grew tufted patches of myrtle, and the tall pointed white heather which gleams like the ghost of some unknown harvest of another world. Down in the dreamland, under the far-away sea, lay shifting shadows of broken white fragments, which are held to be (and why should we churlishly doubt it?) remnants of palaces and temples over which the waters have closed, as over O'Donoghue and his white horse and valiant retainers in our own island of fairy traditions. Fatigue was unfelt; that air of which the elder Tasso spoke—

‘ Si vitale, che gl’ uomini che senza provar,
Altro cielo ci vivono, sono quasi immortali,’ *

fanned their faces, and made the very act of breathing a pleasure !

‘ Up the heather mountain and down the craggy brae,’

undesiring of further rest than frequent pauses to take their fill of gazing,—or to listen laughingly to some pretty peasant, some distaff-spinning matron, some bouquet-giving child, all vainly endeavouring to explain in their curious *patois*, requests to the sight-seers which resolved themselves most distinctly into an unromantic act of mendicancy,—the gay party reunited on their homeward course ; and arrived at the hotel to find Lady Charlotte alert and recovered ; only too willing to hear from Sir Douglas the mournful romance of the poet Tasso’s mad love for the high-born princess whose ducal brother had him imprisoned in darkness and solitude, to expiate his presumption ; and his miserable return, after insane and wretched years, to his sister and the old half-forgotten home,—now only an hotel.

* So pure, that whoso there hath had his birth,
Lives half immortal, even upon earth.

And when that romance in prose was ended, Countess Rufo's German friend repeated Schiller's wonderful ballad of 'The Diver;' and his wife sang one of the sweet wild songs, whose harmonies are indeed 'songs without words.' And after that, on low pleading from Sir Douglas, and urging from all the rest, Gertrude sang.

Some irresistible fancy of the moment urged Sir Douglas to inquire if she had ever heard the ballad of which he recollected the one verse of farewell, as sung by his mother. Yes, she knew it; but even she could not recollect all the words. She did not think it was a complete ballad, but an old fragment of a song of exile; not, she said, from a 'foreign' shore, as Sir Douglas had it, but the 'Irish shore;' and without further preface she began it, in the clear rich voice he loved so to hear.

And while they listened, the day departed, and the moon fell on the unruffled sea where the fisherman's tiny barks flashed gleaming for a moment, and turned their sails again to shadow. The mountains rose beyond, dark and majestic; and the huge form of Vesuvius slept, unlit by its fiery torch, in the white light of the moon.

The oars ceased to sound ; the voices from the shore became less frequent ; the very waves seemed to come more and more softly to the sands, till at length there seemed but one sound left on earth — Gertrude's voice !

That broken fragment of a song is in many an old collection :—

‘ A lightsome heart, a soldier's mien,
And a feather of the blue,
Were all of me you knew, dear love ;
Were all of me you knew !

‘ Now all is done that man can do,
And all is done in vain ;
My love, my native land, adieu,
For we ne'er can meet again.’

He turned him round, and right about,
All on the Irish shore ;
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
With ‘ Adieu for evermore, my love,
Adieu for evermore !’ *

The tender tremulousness of the last line, and the beauty of her face looking dreamily out over

* Since this chapter was published, an imitation of this ballad, (by Sir Walter Scott, with music by A. Sullivan,) has been given to the world. But it can also be had with the original words and music ; as quoted here.

the sea as she sang, melted the heart of more than one of her listeners. But no one spoke to her of her song except Sir Douglas, and he said to her in a choked passionate voice,—

‘If I thought it were “adieu for evermore” between us, in lieu of a sweet sorrowful dream—I should go mad!’

It was a declaration of love, like any other; or unlike any other, for no two declarations of love are alike; any more than any two leaves on a tree, or human faces, or voices, or even the handwriting of two different persons, can be alike.

And though Kenneth, and Lorimer Boyd, and Count Rufo, and the ladies of that happy party, all spoke to Gertrude afterwards, she could not have told what had fallen from any of them, except that at last she heard her mother say, in her softest canary-bird voice,—

‘Well, and what shall we do to-morrow?’

And Sir Douglas answered,—

‘I have business in the morning; but late in the day we might go to Amalfi, and stay a day or two there.’

CHAPTER IX.

A Life of Pleasure.

BUSINESS in the morning. That special morning had long been dedicated to the final examination and arrangement of Kenneth's difficulties, at least so far as his Continental tour was concerned. And now there was yet something else which his uncle desired to talk over with him, beyond and above the unpalatable fact that he must confine his expenses to his own means, and expect no more of this system of what he carelessly termed 'clearing' him, henceforth and for ever!

Sir Douglas arrived at Kenneth's apartments on the Chiaja, very early, very anxious, rather weary, and thoroughly resolved. He had begun to think there was some truth in the severe opinion expressed by his friend Lorimer Boyd,

that the great misfortune of Kenneth's life was his uncle's indulgence.

'Of course,' that friend had said, 'so long as you put a feather-bed for him to fall upon, he will pitch head-foremost like a harlequin, into every scrape and trap on the stage of existence. Leave him to suffer consequences. Either he is capable or incapable of self-conduct. In the one case all your love and pains won't save him, and in the other he will at last find his real level. If I had had an idea you were so in your dotage about this lad, Douglas, I declare I never would have written to you. I expected you to come down upon him in a stern, dignified, offended-guardian sort of way, and here you are for all the world like a nursing mother, whose precious babe has had a tumble! Do, for God's sake, let this be the last time that you actually *help* him to escape from the only lesson his careless mind can profit by—namely, bitter experience.'

There was truth in these words; and they beat hotly in Sir Douglas's ears, as he turned restlessly on his pillow the night they returned from Sorrento. The hours of that night passed on from silvery moonlight to the blue dawn and

the crimson glory of sunrise, without bringing him needful rest. There was too much in the day that was coming, and the day that had passed, for night to be anything but a bar or gap, to divide those eventful intervals.

When the morning stir of life began once more—early as such life begins in the streets of Naples—Sir Douglas bathed, dressed, and went out. Even if Kenneth was not yet up, he would wait. His nephew's manner, the previous evening, had rather wounded him. It was saucy, sullen, and dissatisfied. It was easy to see that he thought himself maltreated, and his uncle officious, in the matter of Lady Charlotte. Kenneth knew that Gertrude disliked and resented any overt disrespect to her mother, yet he could not for the life of him abstain. He thought Lady Charlotte ridiculous, and he showed that he thought her so. He thought Gertrude neglectful of him, and almost, in her calm way, repellent to him the evening before. He was accustomed to be flattered and caressed. He had bid them all good night very curtly, getting out of the carriage in the Chiaja, instead of seeing them to the Villa Mandórlo, and had

walked away with a cigar in his mouth,—looking so like his handsome, wilful father, that, instead of feeling angry, foolish Sir Douglas looked after him with aching tenderness and intense good-will !

On arriving at his lodgings on this particular morning, not only Sir Douglas did not find Kenneth up (that, perhaps, with his habits was scarcely to be expected), but it was doubtful, from the hesitating manner of the servant, whether he had been in at all, since the previous day. Sir Douglas said little to the man, and passed into the room which had been the scene of his first interview and useless lecture. Breakfast was laid, as then ; but not yet touched. All was in the same sort of order, or disorder. The very sunshine appeared to be lying in stereotyped lines on the parquet floor. Sir Douglas threw himself into a lounge-chair by the window, and once more thought over all he meant to say to his nephew ; putting it into the most patient loving words he could frame.

Gradually the silence and warmth, after the rapid morning walk and long wakeful night, had their effect in spite of anxiety ; and Kenneth's

uncle slept as soundly as Lady Charlotte had done after her adventure with the recalcitrant mule at Sorrento.

It is Lord Brougham's theory (and it is also the theory of other thinkers on the same subject) that dreams occupy only a few moments before our waking, and that during their brief passage through the brain, they blend and connect themselves with outward objects of sense and sound.

In proof of which, he says, you have only to go and run a pin sharply into a slumbering friend; and he will inform you, as he starts into consciousness, that he had dreamed for a considerable time; that he has, in fact, had a very long dream, of being attacked by robbers in a wood, or otherwise wounded,—with all graphic and interesting details; all depending on that cruel little poke with a pin which you privately know you had experimentally inflicted upon him a minute before.

Sir Douglas dreamed a very pleasant dream; of wandering in Paradise with Gertrude (and without Lady Charlotte) through interminable groves of orange-trees, white with blossom and golden with fruit; while beyond a sort of rain-

bow caused by the spray of innumerable fountains, for ever rising and falling and lapping against basins of white marble carved with wreaths of immense lilies,—forms of angelic grace, in shimmering vestments of the faintest and most delicate colours, sang to their golden harps in a most ravishing manner; ending always with the burthen ‘Here, there is peace!’

Just as he was straining his dreaming ear for words he could not catch—owing apparently to the very indistinct pronunciation of these agreeable angels—something struck him, lightly but sharply, on the temple; and again immediately afterwards on the cheek.

He started and woke; but so strange was the scene acting round him, that for a minute he fancied that also must be a dream.

A woman shabbily dressed, with resplendent black eyes, and a thin black silk shawl carelessly adjusted over shoulders very obviously deformed, was picking out from manuscript notation a melody of Blumenthal’s for the guitar. A young girl (scarcely in courtesy to be called a young lady), rather pretty, very pale, and dirty and neglected in her dress, sat at the

breakfast-table, picking the bones of a chicken; not ungracefully, though she picked them with her fingers, and seemed exceedingly hungry. Another 'young lady,' still prettier, still paler, and (if possible) in a still more neglected toilette, sat perched on the scrollwork end of the stiff satin sofa opposite Sir Douglas's chair. It is to be presumed she was less hungry than her companion, since her occupation was biting off with her very even white teeth the budding oranges and orange-flowers from a large branch she held in her hand, and aiming at the sleeper with these fragrant pellets.

When this young nymph beheld his amazed eyes open and fix themselves upon her, she leaped from her perch with a lithe activity which even Zizine could not have surpassed, and shrieking out, 'Si sveglia! si sveglia!'—* with a peal of laughter re-echoed by the other occupants of the apartment, she flitted to the furthest end, where a heavy *portière* of yellow silk divided the outer from the inner chamber; and folding the massive brocade round her, so

* He wakes! He wakes!

as only to leave her laughing head visible, seemed to expect that the victim she had so unceremoniously attacked, would start from his trance and follow her. Perceiving after a little breathless pause that this was not to be, she flung the curtains behind her, and returned ; making first a few slow steps on the very tips of her toes, then the light and rapid run performed by ballet-dancers, then three or four pirouettes in succession, and a profound curtsy as a finale.

During the bewildered moment that followed, while Sir Douglas, feeling his situation already sufficiently absurd, looked angrily round for his hat, she skipped, cat-like, into one of the great arm-chairs, and stood up in it as in a rostrum, leaning her arms over the cushioned back, with a roll of music which she had snatched up on the way, and with mock gravity of recitation commenced an oration.

‘Stimatissimo Signore,’ said she in a most nasal Neapolitan *patois*, ‘we rejoice and felicitate you on having slumbered so well, and we hope ——’

What further foolery they might have performed cannot be known, since just as Sir

Douglas attempted to leave the room,—with the courtesy (even to them) of a bow which should include the trio,—and amid renewed peals of mocking laughter, the door opened and Kenneth came in.

Kenneth!

His aspect in that bright Italian morning could scarcely be surpassed in degradation. Staggering drunk; his eyes bloodshot and stupefied; his hair dishevelled; his dress neglected and disordered; his face almost as pale as those of the wild intruders already present, he stood, swaying to and fro, with the handle of the door in his hand, apparently attempting to comprehend what was going on in his rooms.

The door, like many in the old palaces of Naples, was overlaid with tarnished but richly-patterned gilding; and beyond it was another of the heavy yellow satin brocade *portières*. He stood there like a picture set in a wondrous frame. His youth, his exceeding beauty, the grace and strength of his form, only made his present state of untidy helplessness the more saddening. It was a horrible vision!

There was a moment of suspense during which

all stood still. Then his countenance, which had worn a sort of puzzled, embarrassed, idiotic smile of greeting, suddenly assumed an expression of savage anger as he turned slowly from looking at Sir Douglas, and fixed his dull red eyes on the group of women, now huddled together, the elder adjusting her shawl and rolling up her manuscript music, as if in the act of departure.

‘How dare you come here? how many hundred times have I forbid your coming here in the morning?’ muttered the half-conscious drunkard, in broken Italian.

‘You told me on the contrary last night to come to breakfast, and that you would give me a good breakfast,’—whimpered the girl, who had been seated at the table picking chicken-bones.

‘You told me you would like to practise that barcarole; and besides, Signore, to-night is my benefit!’—rapidly protested the elder of the three; ‘and I wanted, therefore, to see your Excellency.’

Then they both spoke together; with loud, shrill, vehement chattering; till the nimble dancer who had awakened Sir Douglas by flinging orange-blossoms, and who had hitherto sat dangling her feet from the arm of the great chair

as a mere looker-on, interfered, and struck up the hand Kenneth had extended towards them in angry gesticulation, with the words, 'Va! tu sei ubriaco come un porco'—'You're as drunk as a hog.' Kenneth seized her by the arm.

'Who says I am drunk? Who dares to say I'm drunk?' shouted he; 'you shall be punished—you shall be imprisoned.'

'Lascia!' exclaimed the girl, releasing her arm from his grasp, and looking him contemptuously in the face—'e dormi!'

'Bestia!' added she in a tone of disgust, as she shook her arm free, and attempted to pass him.

There was a moment when Sir Douglas actually expected Kenneth would return her insult with a blow. He made a step forwards, and Kenneth's arm dropped heavily by his side; but he continued to look at the girl with a dull glare of anger.

'Go!' said he. 'Get out, all of you!'

'What a polite Signore!' said the dancer, with a forced laugh; 'ah! there is no one like an Englishman for fine manners.'

‘Go!’ shouted the drunkard, with an infuriated stamp of his foot; still leaning on the lock of the door with his left hand.

‘At your pleasure!’ bowed the girl, mockingly; and she followed her frightened companions out on the staircase. As she passed she turned her pale pretty head, as the head of the Cenci is turned in the famous picture, and snapped her fingers at him with a gesture of derision and defiance common among the lower orders of the Neapolitans, and which those who study books of chiromancy can find and practise if they please.

There are occasions in life in which beauty seems to wear the devil’s stamp on it, and becomes repulsive instead of attractive.

Such an occasion was the present!

Impossible to be more regularly and perfectly beautiful than Kenneth Ross: he might have been painted as an ideal Apollo. Impossible to have thrown more intense grace of attitude into any action than was shown in that pallid girl’s vulgar and unseemly farewell. But the effect of all this grace and beauty,—under the circum-

stances,—on the sole spectator, was as if he had been struck down by some demoniac spell.

As the door closed on the departing group Sir Douglas sank back in his chair, and covered his face with his hands. Kenneth also seated himself with a staggering gait, and, leaning both arms across the breakfast-table, addressed Sir Douglas; clipping his husky words, and alternately attempting to stand, and dropping back into his seat.

‘You think, I suppose, that these people ain’t—ain’t r’spectable? They *are* r’spectable! Wife of leader of orchestra,—great friend of mine, and leader of orchestra. *You* couldn’t lead orchestra, for all you give yourself such connoisseur airs about music. Quite r’spectable. *Could* you lead orchestra, now? Come, I say, could you, uncle?’ and he laughed an idiotic laugh.

‘O Kenneth, go to bed, and end this scene.’

‘No, I won’t go to bed. You think I’m drunk. I’m not drunk. D—— it, do you think you’re to come the schoolmaster for ever over me, as if I were ten years old? I ain’t drunk. I know all about it. I know that—that to-day’s Tuesday; and we’re—we’re going to settle

accounts. There! is *that* drunk? And we're going—going to Amalfi—going to pick up old ladies who can't—can't ride, eh? Going to—Amalfi. All right; let's go to—to Amalfi; only don't say I'm drunk; and don't set old mother Skifton saying I'm drunk; nor Ger—Ger—'

Sir Douglas sprang to his feet. 'Wretched boy!' exclaimed he, 'don't dare to utter her name.'

Then recovering himself, he repeated sadly, 'O Kenneth, go to your room; go to bed; I'll not irritate you by any observations; if you're not drunk, at least you are not well. We can't talk business while you are in this state. We will put off business till to-morrow. I will return for you later. It is very early still; you will get some hours of sleep. Give me your hand. There, go to your room. Good-bye for the present. Go and rest.'

The cigar-smoking valet bowed Sir Douglas out, muttering, with obsequious smiles, that he would give 'remedies;' that his young Excellency had unfortunately 'met some friends' late last night, and that the 'friends' often persuaded his

young Excellency to excesses he would not otherwise think of. Winding up (in the inevitable style of Italian flattery) that he was sure the young Excellency, *in reality*, would have greatly preferred being with his beloved and illustrious uncle to all other society, in Naples, or elsewhere.

The story of Kenneth's evening would indeed have amazed that sober uncle! Going towards his lodgings in a very discontented frame of mind, he had met with and joined a group of those so-called 'friends,' returning from the theatre of San Carlo. The rest of the night was spent by all in gambling, drinking, and dissipation. When day-dawn was near, he had again lost sums that for him were enormous. The two men who were the largest winners were all for departing with their gains. Kenneth objected: he claimed his *revanche* and appealed to the others. A hot dispute ensued, some of those present being for dispersing, and some thinking Kenneth's proposal no more than reasonable. A young Portuguese nobleman, whose reputation for riches had made him the centre of a certain circle of wild young men, then took the side of the loser. He insisted on remaining and sharing the fate of

the *revanche* with Kenneth. They staked and lost, staked and won, staked and lost again. At length one of their boon companions addressed the Portuguese in a bantering tone, 'Come, Marquis, you are out of luck; try once more,—any stake you please,—and that shall end it.' The young man looked round, set his teeth with a strange smile, and said, 'Well! I'll win it all back with a yard or two of cambric. Mr. Ross, will you go halves in my luck? Two throws of the dice; that won't greatly delay us.'

Yes; Kenneth would go halves in any stake. What was it to be?

The young Marquis rapidly divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, drew over his head one of those wonderfully embroidered Parisian shirts, which he coolly informed the company had cost him seven hundred francs;* observed with a scoffing laugh, as he took his stand by the gaming-table, that his present costume closely resembled that of an English gentleman about to engage in a boxing-match (a sport in which foreigners believe we continually indulge), and

* This anecdote is a fact, though it did not take place in Naples.

then threw the dice. In a few minutes his adversaries, who had thought the scene infinitely diverting, looked rather grave: they had had their throws, and lost.

He had won back the greater portion of the sums they hoped to divide amongst themselves.

He lifted the embroidered dandy garment from the table, tossed it over his arm, made a salute full of gay irony to the company, retired to re-invest himself with the usual amount of clothing, and was heard, a few minutes later, humming an air from the opera of the evening, as he passed down the Toledo on his way to the hotel.

Kenneth had departed with him; having drunk almost too deeply to stand or walk, and with a dim sense, even then, of shame and annoyance, increased, as we have seen, to more intense irritation, by the scene which awaited him in his apartments.

Shrouded now in luxurious curtains, his head feeling as though blistered with fire, and with just enough sense remaining for sullen consciousness of pain,—cursing his folly, his valet, and the remedies by which the latter proposed to put

him in a condition to re-appear creditably in the course of the afternoon,—Kenneth remained for blank hours ‘resting’ in his disordered apartment; while Sir Douglas, once more stepping out into the morning light, directed his steps past the quarter of Sta. Lucia, to the distant verandas of the Villa Mandórlo.

‘There,’ thought he, as he looked at the pleasant sunshine falling on the white walls, ‘there at least, dwells such an image of peace purity and quiet affection, as might mend any man’s broken trust in the goodness of human nature!’

CHAPTER X.

Nominal Love.

KENNETH ROSS also betook himself to the Villa Mandórlo.

Tolerably early in the afternoon (considering all that had occurred), he got languidly into an open carriage, and directed the coachman to drive there; leaving a message for Sir Douglas that he would join him with the rest of the party instead of waiting his return at the palazzo.

Truth to say, Kenneth had no great wish to meet Sir Douglas again so soon. Perhaps to listen to comments extremely unpalatable on his recent conduct; certainly to feel embarrassed and annoyed by the recollection of what had passed. He had other reasons for desiring to pay this visit as speedily as possible, and he dressed with

more haste than was usual with him, or consistent with his many little luxurious fancies; making one long pause before a full-length mirror ere he turned to leave the apartment, he and his valet both fixedly contemplating the image reflected there.

The valet smiled: he thought the young Excellency must be quite satisfied: no one could see more than that his Excellency was '*un poco pallido*,' which was rather interesting than otherwise.

But for once Kenneth was too absorbed to care for compliment. For once he was thinking seriously; though it must be admitted those profound reflections entirely centred in Self.

He was thinking—with that irritated discontent which, in ill-regulated minds, takes the place of penitence—of all the scrapes, follies, and entangled snares of his past life. He was thinking, not without a certain degree of kindness, of Sir Douglas. Not with much gratitude: for it is a very curious fact that gratitude seldom follows over-indulgence; there is no gratitude where there is not respect, and a consciousness that the benefits conferred have not only gone

beyond our deserts, but beyond our deserts even in the opinion of those who have conferred them.

That fond yielding, that love without a conscience, which can 'refuse nothing' to the object beloved,—is trespassed upon again and again, without creating any corresponding sense of favour shown or sacrifices made. It grows to be depended on with blind confidence, but it is received with so little thankfulness, that if at any time a limit seems to be reached, and a halt made in the system of benefactions, the recipient forthwith looks upon his position as that of an ill-used martyr.

'The idea of Old Sir Douglas stickling at helping me now, when he has come forward a dozen times in much worse scrapes without saying a word!' was a speech of Kenneth's over which Lorimer Boyd had frequently growled, but the sentiment of which, to the speaker, seemed perfectly just and natural.

There is a training which helps a man to see life in its true aspect, and there is a training which leads him to see all things reversed and upside down. There are also, it must be confessed, men on whom, as on certain animals, no

hearts are as a general rule 'deceitful and desperately wicked,' but some hearts are *more* deceitful and *more* desperately wicked than others. The leaven of sin may exist in all, but most assuredly it never was so perfectly mixed as to secure to each an equal distribution. The 'weak brother,' and the man who 'hath said in his heart, There is no God,' will display their varieties in the thorny open ground which has superseded the Garden of Eden. Even as it came to pass, in the earliest motherhood on earth, that ABEL reverently knelt to the All-seeing and All-punishing Creator,—and Eve's other son, CAIN, slew him!

Kenneth had had his fair average chances. The good and the evil had both been before him. If his untaught and ungovernable mother had made his holidays, both in boyhood and youth, times to try the relative proportions in his nature of better and worse; in those far longer periods which were *not* spent with her—the periods of school and college—he had the advantage of wise and excellent masters, and companions not likely to corrupt him.

And even in his earlier home his tutor step-father had done his duty honestly and carefully

by the boy ; both before and since the mismatched marriage which Maggie's great beauty at that time bewildered him into making, even without reckoning the possession of a settled home, where he expected to be, but never was, master.

As to over-indulgent Sir Douglas, he had not been there to spoil his little nephew ; and his letters and theories were models of good counsel and grave affection.

Such as Kenneth was, then, he was of his own created nature ; having resisted (what alone can be bestowed by the fondest guidance, on the best or the worst of us) all attempts made to show him what was amiss in his inherent disposition—all persuasion, however eloquent the persuader, to 'stand in the way and consider,'—all efforts to bring him not so much under the government of others, as under *self*-government. The only rule which is safe from rebellion !

On this especial morning he had, as has been stated, that dim discontented consciousness of the result of his errors which is quite distinct from, and independent of, any feeling of repentance. He felt that, somehow or other, things had gone

wrong, and that they required setting to rights; and the mode in which he resolved to set things to rights was by marrying Gertrude Skifton, and giving up, after that, at all events in a great measure, many of the habits which led to so much disaster and inconvenience.

He had always intended this, ever since he had first made her acquaintance. He was what is called 'smitten' immediately with her grace of manner; with her singing, and even with her looks, though Gertrude was not a showy beauty. He heard she had money, and altogether he settled in his own mind that she should be his wife.

He made no more doubt of her acceptance of him, whenever he should ask her, than he did that the sun would rise next day. He had received what he not unfairly considered encouragement from her mother; he was constantly, incessantly, asked to the house; and though Gertrude herself did not do or say much in the way of encouragement, she was evidently more pleased to see him than other friends, and she was, he considered, 'one of your quiet girls,' who could not under the circumstances be expected to say more.

He had intended to wait to make his uncle

aware of his choice, until the scrapes and embarrassments of his position were cleared away. He could hardly go to Lady Charlotte Skifton and propose for Gertrude till his affairs were in a little better order. But this morning he had changed his mind. He was afraid, after the scene he had witnessed, that Sir Douglas might consider some probation or purgation necessary; which would not at all suit him. He resolved, therefore, to cast the die; to make the step he contemplated, irrevocable; and *then* to go to his uncle and say, 'You see I am engaged to marry this girl—a marriage that cannot but please you, who have been preaching something of the sort a long time. Now settle up the difficulties which press upon me, and let me have a proper start, and I'll turn over a new leaf: for, in fact, I'm sick of the life I'm leading.'

When he entered the marble-paved sitting-room, with bright carpets scattered over it, which opened into the decorated gardens of the Villa Mandórlo; he thought, as Gertrude rose to greet him, he had never before seen her look so beautiful. Her complexion was ordinarily rather dull and colourless, but to-day a pink flush had settled

in either cheek, and her manner had something in it tremulous and excited, very different from usual. So different, indeed, that Kenneth began by hoping Lady Charlotte was 'none the worse for yesterday,' conceiving that Gertrude might be nervous on that account.

'No; not at all, thank you. Mamma is quite well; quite; and glad to go on our expedition. We are to sail—Sir Douglas says—to Amalfi. He said he thought it would be less fatiguing, and that you were not very well. Indeed you do not look well,' added she, compassionately.

Kenneth was not sorry that he looked interesting and pale; and plunged very immediately into the story of his love and his hopes; having indeed arranged the thread of his discourse as he sat with folded arms in the carriage that had brought him to that familiar portico. A little, very little of the perfect security of acceptance which he felt, pierced through his love declaration. He tried to keep it under, but it was too strong for complete repression.

As Gertrude listened—instead of becoming more nervous and abashed, she turned extremely pale; and fixed her eyes at last on Kenneth's

face with an expression of amazement not altogether untinged with pain and displeasure.

There was a moment's pause when he had ended his rapid and declamatory pleading; then she spoke, in a low, clear voice,—

‘Mr. Ross, if I had ever given you encouragement—if I had ever even perceived the attachment you say you feel for me, so as to be able to give *dis*-couragement to such a suit—I hope you believe that I would not have left you in doubt on the subject. I never expected this; I never dreamed of it. I will end a position so painful to both of us at once; and tell you that Sir Douglas ——’

‘If my uncle has had the cruelty to come here this morning to poison your mind against me, only because of an unlucky scene at the Palazzo ——’ burst in Kenneth, with excessive anger, without waiting the conclusion of the sentence.

‘You are mistaken, utterly mistaken; he never mentioned you except to say that you were unwell—that we had better sail instead of drive, for that reason.’

‘What then?’

‘How shall I tell you? I had intended you

should hear it from himself. He is gone to your home. He went half-an-hour ago; he said he had appointed with you to return ——'

She stopped, apparently in painful embarrassment.

'What had he to tell me?' said Kenneth, fiercely, his mind still full of the idea that his affairs had somehow been the subject of discussion.

'What *I* must tell you,—now,—at once—and I hope then we may both forget what has just passed between us. Sir Douglas has asked me to become his wife, and I have accepted him.'

Kenneth stared at her doubtfully, angrily, incredulously.

'You are to be married to Old Sir Douglas?'

'I am to be married, I hope, to Sir Douglas.'

With a loud, hoarse, scornful laugh, Kenneth rose.

'Come, you will not cure me by ridicule, of my attachment to you,' he said. 'My uncle is fond of treating me as a child; and if you and he have agreed on some way of reforming me, it is much better you should both be serious, and let me have the benefit of it.'

The offended girl rose also, and with a degree

of dignity and sternness of manner of which Kenneth had not thought that soft nature capable, she replied,—

‘It would, in my opinion, be extremely indecent to jest on such a matter. Nor is Sir Douglas likely to turn his anxieties for you into an acted comedy. I have engaged myself to be his wife. I loved him, I may say, before I even saw him. All I heard of him, all I read of his writing to Mr. Boyd, gave me the impression of his being one of the most loveable of men. I did not know in those days that this great happiness was reserved for me—that he should choose me for his wife; but what welcome you have had here (a welcome with which you now reproach me) was, I assure you, on account of your relationship to *him*. I saw you with interest—with curiosity—as the nephew of the friend whose letters Lorimer Boyd had so often read to us, and the bravery of whose gallant exploits he was never weary of recounting.’

Kenneth did not speak. He stood still, staring angrily in her face. His head ached and swam. His hand trembled as he leaned it on the table between them.

‘ Mr. Ross,’ resumed his companion in a softer tone, ‘ you are very young ; I think you are very little, if at all, older than myself. You will forget the pain of this day, and you will believe—for indeed you may—that I shall always feel as Sir Douglas does towards you,—and I religiously believe that you have hitherto been the main object of interest in his life.’

She held out her hand as she spoke ; but Kenneth did not take it. There are men who, when they are rejected by one they thought to win, enter into the despair of sorrow ; and there are others who, under like circumstances, enter into the despair of *fury* ; and who say things at such times to the object of their so-called ‘ love,’ which, through all their burst of selfish, frantic rage, they themselves know to be cruel atrocious miserable and cowardly falsehoods.

Kenneth passed from the declaration of his so-called love into this despair of fury.

He accused Sir Douglas of the basest treachery ; of having supplanted him by a thousand manœuvres ; of having been aided by Lorimer Boyd to ‘ cut the grass under his feet ’ from

motives of vengeance; Lorimer having himself desired to attain the destiny which he, Kenneth, had made his one great hope in existence. He accused Gertrude of 'throwing him over,' because his uncle and Boyd had conspired to betray to her his embarrassed circumstances; of preferring Sir Douglas only after she had made the discovery that Kenneth was not to be his uncle's heir; of coquetting, and flattering the former into a passion for her, because she thought it a finer thing to be Lady Ross of Glenrossie, than to share his own less magnificent home. He told her he did not believe that she had been indifferent to him, or blind to his obvious attachment; that it was all humbug about his welcome having been given for his unknown uncle's sake. As to that false-hearted uncle, he bitterly affirmed that if Sir Douglas married her, he was marrying from anger, not from love; marrying because he was disappointed in his idea of governing and bullying as if Kenneth were still at school. That no one had a worse opinion of women generally. A thousand times Kenneth had heard him speak of the sex with contemptuous pity and mistrust; and

a thousand times declare that he himself never intended to marry, even when urging his nephew to do so.

Finally, he alluded to Gertrude's 'jilting, or having been jilted by,' the foreign prince to whom her mother had endeavoured to marry her. He made the open taunt that 'even now, perhaps, she did not know her own mind;' and he stopped raving only because his heart beat so violently that he feared another moment would bring death to end its tumult. Panting, wild, staggering backwards, he dropped into his chair.

'O Mr. Ross, *will* you hear me?' murmured the girl he had so insulted, approaching him with that mixture of pity and dread which may be seen in the countenances of those who are nursing a delirious patient.

'Do let me speak to you!' and she glided yet nearer, and rested her trembling fingers lightly on his sleeve, as his clenched hand stretched across the table.

In an instant he started to his feet again.

'Don't touch me, girl!' gasped he in a thick, suffocated whisper; 'don't *dare* to touch me! Your touch makes me comprehend how men are

brought to commit great crimes! I tell you,' and his voice rose again, 'that I do not believe you! And if I find it true, and that I have been made a dupe and a sport of, between you and my uncle and Boyd, I will stab Sir Douglas in the open street,—so help me Heaven!'

With this blasphemous adjuration he reeled towards the door. It opened as he reached it; and Lady Charlotte, with a puzzled expression of fear on her face, confronted him.

'What are you both talking of, so loud and dreadfully?' she said.

'O mamma! beg Mr. Ross not to go just yet! beg him to wait till—till—'

Gertrude looked in her mother's gentle, foolish, bewildered face,—made an attempt to meet her, and fainted.

CHAPTER XI.

The Wayward Heart.

WHEN Kenneth had an opportunity of verifying the truth of a beautiful saying of one now lost and gone, namely, that 'God, who makes such various degrees of weakness and strength in this world of ours, never yet made anything so weak that it will not seek to defend what it loves.'

The feeble silly woman who was Gertrude's mother, said her few words of protection and defence as sensibly as if she had been the most strong-minded of females; reproaching Kenneth for his want of chivalrous feeling and gentlemanlike patience, under disappointment. She relapsed, indeed, into querulous foolishness at one moment, when she told the exasperated young man, that if he really loved her daughter, he 'ought to be glad to see her better married than to himself;' and that 'of course,' for her own part, she liked better to have Sir Douglas with

her, who amused her and treated her with consideration, than Kenneth, who only laughed at her. Neither could she forbear adding, with reference to the new suitor for her daughter's hand, that she felt more as if he was a papa-in-law than a son-in-law, as she herself was not very old, and Gertrude was so much younger, and there was 'so much unexpectedness about the matter.' But she was sure it would make everybody very happy (Kenneth included) 'by-and-by, when they all got used to it.'

Gertrude, in a few trembling sentences, better adapted to soften the wrathful and selfish mood of her disappointed lover, obtained at last of him that he would behave outwardly as if nothing had occurred; await with what patience he could, Sir Douglas's explanation; and allow all arrangements to proceed for their day together, without blighting it by a vain storm of unavailing complaint.

'It is partly for your own sake, Mr. Ross,' she added, in a voice as sweet as her singing, and with a sorrowful smile; 'chiefly, indeed, for your own sake; though it would be a miserable beginning to my different future, if I thought I were to be in any way the cause of alienation

between you and your uncle. I could wish him never to know that you had an ungentle thought towards him—never to know——’

‘Of course, I don’t want him to know that I have been here on a fool’s errand this morning,’ said Kenneth, bitterly, ‘at all events, till I choose to tell him myself.’

‘There is no necessity to tell him. I wish you could look upon it all as a dream. You cannot think how unreal it all seems to me, that—that you should think you loved me!’

‘It is a dream that will haunt me through life, whatever you may think of it,’ replied he, quickly and passionately; ‘but God knows what may happen. You are not his wife yet, and perhaps you never may be. Don’t you think I had better begin “behaving as usual,” by going down to see if the boat is ready? I will wait for you there.’

He spoke the last sentence with a wild sort of joyless laugh. In truth, Kenneth was not even now perfectly recovered from the previous night’s drunkenness; and the very first thing he did, when the carriage had whirled him back to the Chiaja, was to increase still further the state of mingled depression and excitement in which

he found himself, by pouring out and tossing off a full glass of Florentine 'Chartreuse.'

His thoughts then wandered from Gertrude; wandered to Lorimer Boyd; to an observation of his as to the ludicrous contrast between the supposed retirement for the service of God, and devotion to thoughts of Heaven, involved in the profession of monachism; and the establishment of a manufactory for the sale of spirituous liquors, perfumes, rouge, soaps, and delicate unguents, for the support of the monastery and its inmates: 'selling the devil's wares to build churches with!'

Then, with a rush, came back all the pain and mortification of the last hours. Very reckless, very comfortless, Kenneth felt; and very lonely, alone with the monk's green bottle. Some young Italian friends came in, and rallied him on his dejected looks; told him he was no Englishman if he could not stand a merry night without being ill the next morning.

Kenneth did not stand rallying well; though he was fond of practising it towards others. His friends thought him ill-tempered, and left him; to lounge away an hour somewhere else. Kenneth took a cigar; smoked, considered,

looked up into the frank soldier-like countenance with some attempt at an answering smile.

‘I have been to the Palazzo,’ said Sir Douglas, cheerily, ‘but, like the old woman in the nursery ballad, when I looked after my sick puppy, he was out, and quite recovered. No, not quite recovered;’ added he with sudden gravity—‘how ill you look! Oh, Kenneth, my dear boy, if you could but mend your ways! if I could but see you what I dreamed you would be!’

‘For God’s sake let us have none of that now,’ muttered the young man as he turned away towards the boat.

‘No, no, you are right: not now—not now: I had something, however,—something quite different,—to say to you, Kenneth; but it will keep till to-morrow: there is no time for anything; here come our ladies, and Lorimer.’

Our ladies! yes; for that day of careless companionship; and then—what then? Was Kenneth indeed to be distanced and put aside in his wooing by the man whom, if he had guessed the world through, he never would have hit upon, as his rival? It seemed scarcely credible. He would try yet. He would throw for that stake

again. He could not get rid of the notion, based on his excessive vanity, that there was some agreement to test and try him; to pass him through a sort of ordeal of hot ploughshares, and then all was to end in an agreeable little comedy; his uncle smilingly joining the hands of the young couple, and giving them his paternal blessing.

The idea strengthened as Gertrude and her mother advanced: the latter giving a little glad wave of her fringed parasol at Sir Douglas and calling out something about 'military punctuality on the field of battle;' the former, with all the serenity of her soft eyes gone, anxiously looking, not at Sir Douglas, but to Kenneth; and taking his hand with a sigh of relief, while the flush deepened on her cheek as he had seen it deepen in the morning, when he first entered the Villa Mandórlo to declare his love.

It was Kenneth too, who handed her into the boat, and seated himself by her side; his uncle and Lady Charlotte being opposite, and Lorimer Boyd unslinging his sketching portfolio and putting it down with Gertrude's guitar-case at their feet. For the moment, Kenneth's spirits rose.

No one could tell, not even Kenneth himself

—for these things depend as entirely as the warning sense of danger in animals, on quick instinct rather than reason or calculation—why the conviction of his hope being founded on folly, and on expectations that never would be realised, fell suddenly with a cold chill on his heart.

Something in Gertrude's manner to Sir Douglas, something in Sir Douglas's manner to her; in the intense quiet gloom of Lorimer Boyd; in the fidgety and increased attention of Lady Charlotte to his uncle;—struck his excited mind as proof positive that the little comedy he had conceived might be enacted for his benefit, was *not* being played: that all was real bitter earnest: that he had vowed in vain to quit his foolish course of life and 'better his condition' in more ways than one, by uniting his destiny with Gertrude Skifton's; that he had planned in vain scenes of lover-like anger and lover-like forgiveness, when she should at length admit that she had merely joined his guardian friend in schemes of reformation; that she had no such scheme, and no *arrière pensée*, but in all singleness and truth of heart, loved Sir Douglas, and was beloved by him!

Those who have been jealous,—who have known what it is to receive that

‘Confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ’—

which is brought to the inner soul by looks words or circumstances which to uninterested spectators seem trivial, or utterly indifferent,—may comprehend the revelation. It was not brought by any increased *empressement* or happy security in Sir Douglas’s manner; he had always been dignified; even from boyhood, when his inimical step-mother had sneered at him as ‘that very gentlemanlike young gentleman, Mr. Douglas Ross;’ he was the last man in the world to make a public wooing of the object of his choice. Nor was Gertrude likely to indulge in that peculiar manner sometimes not very gracefully adopted by ‘engaged’ young ladies. To a stranger and ordinary acquaintance, the very curves and indentations of the Bay of Naples could not seem more unchanged since the previous day, than the conduct of all parties concerned. But to Kenneth, enamoured as far as his nature was capable of diverging from self, stung and shaken in the very midst of his utter security of success—and involuntarily watch-

ful of the least sign that should confirm or alter his wavering conjectures, the meaning of all he saw was written in fire on his brain. The 'Mene, mene, tekeli, upharsin,' that prophesied the loss of his heart's kingdom, came between him and the shining white sail of the lightly wafted boat,—even as it stole over the marble walls of the feasting monarch in Scripture. His head, aching and dizzy from the renewed excess of stimulant taken on his return from the Villa Mandórlo, became confused alike from the crowding of comfortless thoughts and the movement of the bark over the waters. He passed his hand across his brow several times as if in pain; and began talking wildly, cynically, and in a strain anything but moral, of love and lovers. The attempt to answer, or to repress his talk, only excited him the more. He was conscious, but rather as if dreaming than waking, of the expression of shame, sorrow, and anxiety, which clouded his uncle's face; of intense and deadly fear in that of Gertrude; of utter scorn in Lorimer Boyd's. While Lady Charlotte, really angry at the things said before her daughter, but not exactly knowing how to notice them, kept biting the end of her parasol and

repeating with a foolish smile, 'You naughty boy, arn't you ashamed to say such wickedness before your uncle?'

Kenneth noticed her addressing him, with a hoarse laugh. 'Oh, my uncle is younger than I am,' he said; 'we are to be boon-companions soon. I believe he is in love. Mr. Lorimer Boyd, grave Mr. Lorimer Boyd, were *you* ever in love? were you a faithful shepherd, or do you hold, as I do, with Alfred de Musset—

"Aimer est le grand point,—qu'importe la maitresse?
Qu'importe le flacon pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse?
S'il est vrai que Schiller n'ait aimé qu'Amélie,
Goethe que Marguerite, et Rousseau que Julie,
Que la terre"*

What comes next? by Jove I can't recollect in the least, what comes next. Do you recollect, uncle? you're a French scholar.'

* 'The main point is to love. No matter whom!
Delicious drunkenness! —be thou our doom
From *any* glass!

What if great Schiller loved
Amelia only? Goethe's heart were moved
By none save Margaret? And that Rousseau sighed
Eut for Julie? The earth'

Sir Douglas was looking back towards Naples. 'I think we will return,' said he sadly and sternly. 'Kenneth, you are quite well enough to understand me when I say that your conduct here, where those present have no option but to listen to you, is an outrage on all good taste and good feeling.'

Kenneth looked towards him with fierce moodiness, apparently irresolute what reply to make. Then, his eye falling on the guitar-case, he sullenly touched it with his foot. 'Perhaps you think there should be no conversation at all. Singing would be better: love-songs: chansons d'adieu: "Partant pour la Syrie,"—which, being a soldier's love-song, the French take, very properly, for their notion of a national hymn. Shall you sing again this evening, Miss Gertrude Skifton? Shall you sing us a chanson d'adieu?'

The lovely eyes were lifted to his in mute deprecation and appeal, but in vain.

'Do sing! sing us the song of last night: "Adieu for evermore!"'

'Kenneth, I implore—I *command* you—to be silent!' said Sir Douglas, in a voice trembling with suppressed passion.

‘Silent? quite silent? very well—yes. I am *de trop* here. I’ll sing an adieu myself. I’ll give you an adieu in plain prose. Don’t trouble yourselves to put back to Naples by way of getting rid of me; I’ll give you “adieu for evermore” without that; for I’ll bear this d—d life no longer!’

With the last sentence Kenneth stood up; rocking the boat, and causing Lady Charlotte to utter a series of little sharp short shrieks of terror. As he spoke the concluding words, he touched the mast lightly with his hand to steady his leap, sprang head-foremost into the waves, and sank before their eyes! .

Gertrude’s shriek echoed her mother’s. ‘This is my fault,’ she said wildly. ‘Save him! save him!’

Lorimer Boyd watched the water with a keen glance. ‘Can any of you swim?’ he said to the boatmen, laying his hand heavily on Sir Douglas’s arm, who had already thrown off his coat in preparation for rescue.

‘Io, Signor!’ answered one of the men.

It is a strange fact that in a seafaring population like that of Naples, very few of the men are

able to swim ; and still fewer have either courage or presence of mind in emergencies like the one which had just occurred. Many of our English sailors cannot swim. Many gentlemen in various professions, to whom that accomplishment would be not only useful but perhaps absolutely necessary, are equally ignorant of it. When the St. Augustine College at Canterbury was established, it was resolved that even those who were preparing for holy orders should learn to swim ; more than one of the pious and energetic followers of George Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, having lost their lives from incapacity in this respect.

One man, and one only, on board the Neapolitan bark of pleasure which bore Kenneth and his companions, could swim. That one had been a coral-diver, and, in the exercise of his dangerous profession, many a bold and daring feat, many a narrow and hair-breadth escape, had been his.

‘Io, Signor!’

And, while he spoke, he stood half-naked, watching, as Lorimer Boyd watched, across the waters near at hand,—for the wretched, beautiful, drunken youth who ought to rise there, or somewhere thereabouts. A dreadful watch.

But Kenneth was cumbered, not only with the will to perish,—the will of a drunken, languid man— but with the clothing he had almost mechanically adopted in preparation for a moonlight return to Naples, over the chilly waters of the sun-forsaken sea.

A heavy fur pelisse, strapped and fastened at the throat, in addition to his usual over-coat, made Kenneth's habiliments a dreadful obstacle to his safety from that self-sought grave. But the merciful chance was yet in his favour, that the coral-diver, Giuseppe, happened to be one of the crew that day!

While others of the crew were exclaiming, and praying to saints and madonnas, this man,—stripped to the last and lightest of garments,—watched and waited; and, when the involuntary rising of the drunken suicide took place, he was there to rescue him.

There was no struggle. Kenneth was utterly insensible when Giuseppe swam towards the bark, which neared him as far as was practicable. The difficulty was to get both on board. That also was accomplished at last, and the bark was steered towards the haven it had so lately left.

CHAPTER XII.

Bitter Pangs.

SNATCHED from death,—but pale, insensible, and apparently dying in spite of rescue, Kenneth Ross was borne on shore, and taken to the luxurious lodging in the Palazzo on the Chiaja, which he had so lately left in the pride and strength of youthful manhood. Sir Douglas accompanied him; loth to lose sight of him even for the purpose of escorting Gertrude to the Villa Mandórlo. Lorimer Boyd would see her and her mother home.

To Lorimer Boyd, her father's friend and her own, Gertrude Skifton resolved to confide the agitating events of the morning; to beseech his intervention with this hot-headed and reckless young man, and to endeavour in some way to arrange so as to spare Sir Douglas the pain of

knowing what had occurred between him and Gertrude.

‘I am sure,’ she said, ‘you will forgive me for appealing to you, Mr. Boyd. Your constant kindness to my father,—for many a weary day of suffering and illness,—and your tender compassion to myself and my poor mother, make me look to you almost as a second father; as a friend who will not forsake, or think anything a trouble. Do not let Sir Douglas know what has passed. I owe to *you* all my first knowledge of him: of his goodness, his unselfishness, his courage, his loveable qualities. Of course, when I saw him’—(and here poor Gertrude both smiled and blushed) ‘seeing him rather surprised me. I had imagined a much older and sterner man. He is so gentle. He is so good . . . I cannot understand how Mr. Kenneth Ross could venture to vex and anger him. But I rely on you: on *you*, entirely, dear Mr. Boyd, to smooth away all difficulties, and prevent Mr. Kenneth Ross from being injured, and Sir Douglas from being vexed; and I am sure you will manage this—for my sake!’

What if Lorimer Boyd winced under this appeal,—this placing *him* in the rank of a

'second father,' while it elevated Douglas Ross (his schoolfellow and contemporary) into a hero of romance and adored lover? No sigh escaped him; no shadow clouded his friendly smile; no extra pressure of the eager little white hand extended to him, told of a more than common and relied-on interest, in all that concerned Gertrude Skifton.

He undertook to reason with Kenneth; to endeavour to persuade him to travel; to do his best to spare a single pang to Sir Douglas; already in possession of a prospective happiness which might well repay, in Lorimer's opinion, any amount of previous pain or sacrifice.

He left the Villa Mandórlo as the soft moonlight stole over its white walls and green verandahs, with a heart at rest, as to his willingness to serve the gentle girl who bid him farewell in happy trust. And she sent her whispered blessing far through the moonlight across the blossoming almond-trees; down to the rippling sea which laved the shore where that Palazzo on the Chiaja covered in the unquiet night, passed by Sir Douglas by the couch of his nephew.

In the strength of youth and a good constitution, strong in spite of excess and fatigue,

Kenneth struggled with the shock of his late rash attempt at suicide.

More fondly watched he could not be than by his uncle. Unconscious of all that had passed between Kenneth and Gertrude; attributing his state of mind merely to the pernicious habits which had taken possession of him; his fondness more sensitively alive than ever, after the horrible danger which had been averted, Sir Douglas sat alternately watching and reading by the bedside of the reckless young man; giving remedies; speaking from time to time in a soothing tone of tenderness which seemed to lull the half-conscious mind; waiting for clearer thought, and more exact answers, as to the grief of heart which had impelled him to that folly and sin.

No clue, however remote, to the real cause had reached Sir Douglas. As he gazed from time to time at the pallid, beautiful face, with the damp curls still clustering heavily round the brow, he pleased himself with a peaceful dream of the aid Gertrude might give hereafter to his efforts at reclaiming this prodigal; and imaged to himself her sweet irresistible voice pleading, even more successfully than he himself could plead, the

cause of virtue, and the value of tranquil rational days.

Towards day-dawn Kenneth became entirely himself. Conscious, and miserable; conscious, and fiercely angry. To the gentle inquiries which hitherto had either received a confused response or none, he at length made fierce, sullen, but coherent replies.

‘You think me drunk or wandering,’ he said; ‘you are mistaken! I have my senses as perfectly as you have yours. I know you. I know all your treachery and cruelty: all that you have plotted and contrived: all that your coming to Naples was intended to effect, and has effected. I know that, hearing of my love and Gertrude’s beauty, you came here pre-determined to outwit me: that Lorimer Boyd has assisted you in every step you took. That, while you affected to be endeavouring to reform me, you were undermining the very roots by which I held to life: and, while you spoke to me of marriage, and a steady peaceful future, you were mocking me with a parcel of meaningless words.’

‘Kenneth, Kenneth, my own poor lad, do try to be rational. I am here, beside you; longing

to serve you; ready to make any sacrifice for you; loving you, in spite of all error, with as deep a love as ever one man felt for another. Trust me, my boy; trust me; tell me your vexations! Something more than common weighs upon you: if I can lift it away, do you think I will not do it? My dear lad, *try me.*'

As he spoke, he leaned eagerly, tenderly over the pillow, looking into those dim wild eyes, as if to read the thoughts of the speaker.

Kenneth closed them with a groan. Then, lifting the hot weary lids, with a fierce glance at his uncle, he muttered,—

'You mock me even now. I tell you, you have yourself ruined my destiny. You spoke to me of marriage, of reforming my life, of purity, of peace. You, you have deprived me of all chance of them. Gertrude Skifton was my dream of peace, and purity, and marriage, and you have taken her from me. She loved me. I know she loved me—till you came to poison her mind against me,—you who swore to protect me.'

'Kenneth,' said Sir Douglas, in a solemn tone, 'do not mock the name of love with such blasphemy, for the sake of vexing me! Do you

forget that this very morning, in this very apartment, I saw the companions of your dissipated hour, and witnessed a scene incompatible with any thought of a future of peace and purity, such as you speak of desiring to attain ?’

‘What of that?’ passionately exclaimed his nephew. ‘Will you persuade me you yourself have lived the life of an anchorite, pitching your tent for ever among preachers and puritans ? I tell you, whatever you witnessed this morning, that I loved Gertrude Skifton ; aye, and Gertrude Skifton loved *me*—and, if she has accepted you, it is because that worldly idiot, her mother, has persuaded her to do so ; persuaded her that it is better than marrying me—a half-ruined man,—and nearly as good a thing as catching the Prince Colonna.

‘Good God!’ continued he, wildly, raising himself on his elbow, and looking fiercely in his uncle’s face—‘do you forget that we were together every day for two months before you ever came amongst us ? Do you suppose I believe that you came all the way to Naples for me, and not for her ? You lecture me ; you preach to me ; you tell me of my profligacy, my

extravagance, and the Lord knows what besides. I choose for my wife a good, pure girl, of good family, with a fortune of her own, with everything that may give me a chance of rescue, and you come and take her from me! I tell you I curse the day you ever meddled with my affairs and me. I tell you, if you marry this girl, you are marrying the woman *I* love, and who loves *me*; loves *me*, not you, whatever she or her mother may persuade you to the contrary. Ask all Naples whom she was supposed to favour before you came between us! Ask your own conscience whether you have not sought to divide us, knowing that fact! Ask *her*, whom I reproached this morning, and whom I curse in my heart at this moment for her wanton caprice! I curse you both. I hope the pain at my heart may pour poison into yours; I hope Heaven will make a blight that shall fall on your marriage if ever it does take place, and turn all that seemed to promise happiness, into gall, wormwood, and bitterness. I hope ——'

'O God, Kenneth—cease!'

It was all Sir Douglas could say. He said it with ashy, trembling lips. His face was as pale

as that of the half-drowned man who cursed him now from his pillow.

It was all false; cruelly false; that he had known of this love,—that he had plotted against it,—that he had ‘outwitted’ his nephew. It was all false, he trusted (nay, knew), that Gertrude would accept him merely from ambition. Surely she might pretend to far, far greater rank and fortune than he could offer her! It was all false, that he came to Naples knowing of this intimacy. Of this Lorimer Boyd had spoken never a word in his letter.

But one thing remained true: and that one thing went near to break his heart. He was Kenneth’s rival. KENNETH! his petted, idolised, spoilt boy,—his more than child,—on whom he had poured the double love bestowed on his dead brother and on himself.

The scene rose up before him of that brother’s death-bed. Of the bruised, painful, groaning death; of the wild fair woman; of the little curly-headed child sitting at the pillow, smiling in his face, thinking he was the doctor come to cure all that shattered frame and restore his father; of his brother’s imploring prayer to

protect little Kenneth, and not to disown him !

And now, there he lay—that curly-headed child,—a wayward angry man, just escaped, by God’s mercy, from the crime of self-murder, and declaring his life blighted by the very man who had sworn to protect him.

Kenneth’s rival !

Sir Douglas turned that bitter thought over and over in his mind ; watching through the comfortless night,—long after opiates and exhaustion had quieted that bitter tongue, and given temporary peace to that perturbed heart.

Kenneth’s rival !

How to escape from that one strange, depressing thought ! how to make all those reproaches seem vague and senseless, as the sound of the storm-wind sweeping over the surging sea !

In the morning he would see Gertrude ; she would speak of this ; they would consult together ; something then might be contrived and executed to soothe and save Kenneth. Till he saw Gertrude, Sir Douglas would resolve on nothing.

But, when the morning came, and the bright, early day permitted him, after the restless hours of that long long night, to seek the home that sheltered her more peaceful slumbers—she told him nothing!

The serene loving eyes again lifted to his face, seemed without a secret in their transparent depths; and yet, of all that stormy yesterday,—that scene of reproach which Kenneth had vaguely alluded to, not a word was breathed.

Sir Douglas would not ask her. His heart seemed to choke in his breast as often as he thought to frame the words that might solve his doubts. Was it all delirium? Was it possible Kenneth had so much ‘method in his madness’ as to rave of scenes that never took place, and feelings that were imaginary?

Was it a dream? or had Sir Douglas indeed passed this wretched night, cursed by the being he had loved better than all else in the world till he met with Gertrude? If it was not a dream, what could he do? How extricate himself from that position of grief?

Almost, when Gertrude said tenderly, ‘You look so weary, I cannot bear to think of the night

you must have gone through,'—*almost* the answer burst forth—'Yes, it has been a bitter night! Is it true? Oh! tell me if it is true? Am I poor Kenneth's rival?'

But the soft eyes, in their undisturbed love, dwelling quietly on him, on her mother, on all objects round her, seemed for ever to lull the wild question away.

He would stay with Gertrude till it was likely Kenneth would be awake and stirring, after all the exhaustion and the long slumber that follows an opiate; and then he would have a quieter explanation with that young angry mind, and learn how much or how little was unremembered delirium, and how much was truth, in the ravings of the night before.

Gertrude walked with him through the long pergola, under the trailing vines, out to the very verge of the seaward terrace, from whence, by a rocky path, a short cut would lead him to the Chiaja.

He looked back after they had parted, and saw her still watching him: the tender smile still lingered on her lips; her folded arms rested on the low marble wall which bounded the terrace.

The morning light fell in all its freshness on her candid brow and wavy chesnut hair, and deepened into sunshine while he gazed.

It was an attitude of peace and tranquil love. He paused for a few seconds to contemplate her; returned her smile (somewhat sadly), and hastened onwards to greet Kenneth at his wakening: for it was now some hours since he had left him, and Sir Douglas felt restless till some more intelligible explanation should succeed the frenzy of the night before.

CHAPTER XIII.

Troubled Joys.

THERE are days in life during which, though we have all our senses about us, we seem to be walking in a bad dream ; and such was the sensation with which Sir Douglas retraced his steps that morning. Outward objects made no impression. The beauty of the scenery, the tumultuous stir of the population, the greeting of casual acquaintances, alike passed unheeded. He was what is not unaptly termed, 'buried in thought.'

Deep and dark is that burial ; but it is not calm, like death. The quick blood beat at his heart, and throbbed in his temples. It was almost with a feeling of joyful refreshment that his mind woke, at last, to a perception of visible and earthly things, under the influence of one of those sudden

storms that visit the Mediterranean. The rain came in heavy drops, in drifting streams; the sea changed from blue to green, from green to purple, and sent its waves, fringed with wrathful foam, dashing from the bay over the shore, to crown with a mixture of silver and snow the heads of the stunted trees that grow in a formal line along the Villa Reale. In that change he breathed more freely.

He stood for a few minutes gazing at the scene, bare-headed; his cloak fluttering in the wild wind—as he used to love to stand on the hills above Glenrossie when he came back, an eager boy, for his Eton holidays. The pain at his heart seemed lightened. The demon of doubt which oppressed him (though he was scarcely conscious of his cause of torment) made itself wings and went out into the storm. As he ascended the staircase of the Palazzo he met Lorimer Boyd coming down. ‘He is asleep and doing well,’ said the latter as he grasped his old friend by the hand. Then he passed rapidly down, and Sir Douglas proceeded to his nephew’s room.

The peace of sleep is nearly as beautiful as

the peace of death—nearly as beautiful as that unutterable calm whose placidity awes us when we sob over our lost ones, and compels us to pause in our weeping, and gaze on the face whose many changes were so familiar and so dear; yearning for a break in that calm; a quiver in that strange set smile; something that shall seem human and sympathetic—something, we know not what, that will not freeze us with such intense conviction that the smiles and tears, and sunshine and shadow, of earth's emotions are over; and that what we loved has passed away to the world where there is no more change!

Pale and peaceful, without a cloud on the young smooth forehead; recovering, apparently, from all evil effects of yesterday's events as quietly as a convalescent child; thus it was that Sir Douglas found his nephew. A little fluttering tremor in breathing, coming now and then like a light movement of leaves in spring weather, alone spoke of past disturbance. His uncle sat down once more where he had watched during the preceding night, and watched again—and so watching, ceased to think of himself,

and thought entirely and only of Kenneth. How nearly he had lost him: how horrible this day would have been, if the young man who lay there in stillness and shadow was DEAD instead of sleeping!

Thinking of all this with a tender heart, the watcher bent forwards to the slumberer, and kissed his cheek. Gently as that kiss was given, it seemed to rouse the dormant faculty of thought; the expression of pain and anger flickered anew over the features; the short savage laugh which Kenneth laughed when he was provoked, sounded feebly from his lips; and he muttered, 'No, Gertrude, no—

'Come not to weep for me when I am gone,
Nor drop your foolish tears upon my grave.'

'there's a true poet's true thought for you!
Where—where is—where am I?'

With the last words Kenneth looked round wildly, uncomfortably. 'I thought she was here,' he said: 'women are such fools! But she is not fool enough for that;' and the same laugh, painful to listen to, was repeated.

'Kenneth, I do adjure you, if ever you felt

affection for me, try and collect yourself, and be frank with me, instead of making my heart ache with your wild sayings.'

The lip of the speaker quivered as he spoke, and he looked at the young face with almost piteous appeal. But Kenneth only laughed again more bitterly.

'Your heart ache!' he said. 'Well, that is good! what is it, another of your rhymesters says,—'condemned alike to groan!'—It's all fair, you know—'alike to groan.' You say, let's talk of Gertrude Skifton; I say d——n her, don't let's think any more about her! The poet says,—Do you know that your friend, Lorimer Boyd, is a poet? Fact. A sonnet to his mistress's eyebrow. I said, when I read it, 'Well, my dear fellow, go in and win—if you can.' He can't, my dear uncle—because—Good God, what is that?' exclaimed he, suddenly interrupting himself: 'that—that figure in white? It is not Gertrude; I thought at first it was Gertrude,—it's more like Lady Charlotte, but it's a drowned woman—ha, ha, ha; some one has pitched her out of the boat! No—I declare it—it is my mother; don't you

see it?—strike at it. Go round and sit there — hinder those things from crowding round me : there's a crocodile lifting its snout out of the water on to the bed. I thought crocodiles lived in the Nile ; I—I never saw one before—help, uncle, help !'

The thread of thought was broken. From this time, for many days, Kenneth merely raved. In his ravings the most insolent reproaches to Gertrude, to Lady Charlotte, were mingled with the most passionate declarations of love ; and promises, if she would abide by him, to 'lead a new life,' and be a different creature. At one period he seemed to consider that she had consented, and that Sir Douglas had returned to Scotland.

'Now we shall be happy,' he said ; 'I don't wish him dead—I never wished Old Sir Douglas dead ; but I'm glad he's gone. I hope he's gone for ever. I hope I shall never see him again—never—never—never ! We'll go where he can't follow, over the sea, under the sea ; I've been under the sea. It is beautiful, only there are crocodiles and sea-serpents, and strange dreadful things—'

And then again the delirium of fear would

seize him, and the suffering, while it broke Sir Douglas's heart to witness, would take a form yet more painful and terrible, as it diverged yet farther and farther from the realms of reason and probability.

The best medical advice could do little in a case like Kenneth's. The disturbed brain must suffer its miserable fever, the disease must 'run its course,' and then those who cared for the prolongation of that erring life must trust to the great mysterious chance of 'strength of constitution' to carry him safe past the storm of that trial into some haven of quiet and health.

And into that haven sailed the storm-beaten bark of life; in spite of rent and shattered sails. Kenneth was pronounced 'out of danger,' 'convalescent,' 'nearly as usual.' Friends congratulated, companions came to see him. The sounds of laughter and common conversation were once more heard in that silent woe-begone chamber. The sunshine of glorious Italy was once more allowed to send rippling smiles over the uncarpeted floor. The hour of suffering was past,—as far as bodily suffering was concerned.

But the mental suffering, which Sir Douglas

had endured, was not past. In the long dreary hours of his steady and patient watches by that bedside; all the knowledge that his nephew was delirious, all the comfort mixed with pain which such knowledge brought, could not avail entirely to smother the conviction that something had in very deed and truth occurred between him and Gertrude Skifton; some love-passage, some declaration accepted or rejected, of which Sir Douglas had never been informed by his betrothed wife.

Frank by nature, and frank on principle; loving truth as all noble natures love it, and holding it as the first of religious virtues; his soul shuddered at the sorrowful doubt that sometimes overshadowed him. He used to rise, after listening to Kenneth's ravings, and go with rapid impatience to the Villa Mandórlo, determined to put this doubt to the test; to question Gertrude; to clear up the mystery of this disturbance. And then would come the revulsion. Question her? If it could be necessary to *question*; if, in the relative position in which they stood towards each other, confidence was not spontaneous; would it lessen his grief to wring from her any answer?

Would that answer be guarded and cold? Would she resent being doubted, and account for it all?

He was haunted by her sudden exclamation in the boat, the day that Kenneth tempted Providence by leaping from it into the waves. 'Oh, this is *my* fault,' she had said—'my fault! Save him! save him!'

How was it her fault, if Kenneth had not in some way been justified in reckoning on her love? How otherwise could it be her fault? Once only, (bitter once!) had the subject been broached between them; and her answer only added to Sir Douglas's perplexity. It was after a series of more than usually virulent and scornful outbursts from Kenneth, through feverish hours of rambling, that Sir Douglas, jaded and weary, had entered at the open door from the terrace into the room where Gertrude sat absorbed in thought. She started when conscious of his approach; and looking at him with sorrowful tenderness, said, 'I should not have recognized your step, it was so slow! Oh, you will be ill yourself—I am sure you will. Is Kenneth very bad, very wild to-day?'

'Yes, Gertrude, very wild! He has been

raising of many things. Hard bitter reproaches to me, who have done him no conscious wrong. Hard, bitter reproaches to others—to you—to your mother. I wish——’

What he wished he could not say ; he stopped in agitation, only to see how agitated Gertrude was. She did not lift those unequalled eyes to his face as was her wont ; she looked down : she trembled : she stretched out both her hands with a sort of blind groping for his, which she held almost convulsively in her own.

‘ Oh, do not believe him,’ she said ; ‘ you know he is delirious ! He loves and honours you ; he has no other thought : people speak exactly the reverse of their real sentiments in these illnesses. I heard the doctor say so. He would not vex or harm you for the world, when he is himself. And as for me,’ she faltered, ‘ I am sure he should not reproach me ; I have no wish but for his good.’

How could she shape her sentences so as to satisfy this generous heart ? How tell him that in the wild appeal for love made to her by that reckless nephew, his final phrase had been that he would stab his uncle in the public street ? Her

part was surely to soothe and reconcile all differences: to conceal all bitterness: not to set the uncle against the beloved nephew by repeating frantic words, spoken perhaps in the incipient stage of this dreadful malady. Was she not already indeed the cause, the involuntary cause, of disaster and disappointment to Kenneth? Not so much with reference to his supposed love for her,—which she herself looked upon as a wayward passing fancy,—but with reference to his prospects in life. Was she not building up her own happiness on a sort of downfall of his previous expectations? No longer to be his uncle's heir, no longer his first object; she herself to be that first object, and perhaps mother to sons dearer than even he had ever been to the loving heart that beat beside her.

Trembling, flushed, shy with a thousand such crowding thoughts, Gertrude struggled through her conversation with Sir Douglas; adjuring him above all things to try and spare himself so much fatigue; advising 'him' not to sit always listening to painful things when it could do Kenneth no good.' Till at length, when Sir Douglas rose to leave her, she crept a little closer to him, and

murmured once more,—‘And remember *all* he says is delirium!’

Sir Douglas was tall, and in their farewells Gertrude had a pretty customary shyness of bowing her head beneath his, to receive his parting caress. As they stood together now, with clasped hands, she moved her head gently towards him : but the lips that were wont so fondly to press the glossy chesnut hair, refrained from their habitual salute. His hand wrung hers, with something more of grief than love : and when she looked up she saw his eyes full of troubled tears.

‘Oh, Heaven!’ she said, ‘you are quite worn out! Do not sit with Kenneth! Do not listen to him! Do not trust a word he says in such an illness as this! Leave the nurse with him, this one night, and come back and let me sing to you in the evening. The first time I ever saw you, I was singing!’

Sir Douglas sighed painfully. He, too, remembered that night. Kenneth was in attendance upon her, then. It was he who had accompanied his uncle for the first time to her home. He was turning over the leaves of her music-book, when she asked who the stranger was, and received

the audible reply, that it was Kenneth's uncle, 'Old Sir Douglas.' The scene rose like a vision before him. He saw the slender handsome youth standing by the instrument; and the girl whose soft glance had been lifted to his and then withdrawn, in the embarrassment of being overheard in her questioning; an embarrassment which he recollected sharing. A pang shot through his heart, sharper than any that had yet visited it. Was it not more natural that these young companions should love each other, than that Gertrude should lean across the gap of years that sundered her from himself, and prefer him to one whose faults she could not know, and whose advantages were so many?

All of a sudden he seemed to grow old, as in a fairy tale! Memory flew back through crowded adventures. Midnight fields of silence, after battles fought in foreign lands. The deaths, long, long ago, of companions in arms, whose children were now grown up, whose widows were remarried; the mourning for whom was a forgotten thing. Passionate fancies that had tempted his youth: some bravely withstood, some yielded to and repented of, but all so far away in

the vista of the irrevocable past ; all so long, so *very* long ago !

Almost he felt ashamed of the sudden choice, the rash avowal, the witchery that had enslaved him to the young girl, who, it was true, he had seen daily since his coming to Naples, but who, two months ago, was a stranger to him ! Was it thus, that a man in mature life, should choose a companion for the remainder of his days ? Had he done selfishly, blindly ?

Thought is a thousand-fold more rapid than words. Scarcely had he held the little taper fingers in his own without speaking, long enough for her to wonder at his silence, before all this and more had passed through his aching brain. An exclamation, almost a moan, escaped his lips, ere he at length pressed them fervently on her forehead. One sole idea,—that he was ill,—possessed Gertrude. For the first time she returned his caress ; twined her arms round his neck, as if to bring the dear head nearer ; and murmured passionately, ‘ If you won’t take care for your own sake—take care for mine ! What will become of me, if you are ill without me ? ’

That evening Kenneth was left to the nurse.

Not for long : the night-watch was still kept : but during the clear and lovely evening, Sir Douglas sat and listened to Gertrude's singing ; watching the mouth that sang, and the shadowy, downcast eyes that seemed to dream over the notes.

He gazed and listened. He told himself he did not doubt her. To doubt her was not possible. Yet he felt sad ; the old classic fables taught to him in his boyhood, rose as if to mock him ; and the story of the Sirens disturbed his mind, even while he told it to Gertrude, and laughed.

She watched him after their farewell, as he passed darkly through the moonlight, down the shelving tiers of terraces. 'Yes,' she said to herself, 'I do right. It is better he should never know. We shall all have to live much together. He must not learn to think of Kenneth with aught but love and trust. And Kenneth himself will grow to think of all as a dream. But oh ! how I longed to have no thought hidden from him : to tell him all : and what a pain it is to feel that it cannot be !'

And then her mother, who also had watched that receding form, turned and kissed the flushed

cheek where still burned the touch of a more disturbing caress.

‘Well, dear,’ said Lady Charlotte, ‘you know your own heart best; but I don’t think I ever could love Sir Douglas! I never could feel *au niveau* of him, you know. I have observed that you never feel that. You feel *au niveau* of everybody, I believe. But I should be a little—just a very little—afraid of him, you know.’

‘Should you, darling mother?’ said Gertrude, dreamily,—‘I think him perfect! My wonder is that he could choose *me*: he must have seen so many far worthier than I am to be his wife.’

And the young girl’s fancy also wandered blindly into Sir Douglas’s past. Who had filled it with woman’s great event of life,—Love? Whom had he loved before he met her?—*in his youth*? And Gertrude felt that somehow his youth lay far away from hers: as *he* had felt, at their earlier meeting that same day.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Friend and a Lover.

THE days rolled on. The doctor who had attended Kenneth especially impressed on Sir Douglas and all friends that his main safety lay in tranquillity. Nothing was to be said or done that could call back disturbance to his mind. No lecturing on pernicious habits of late hours and reckless dissipation; no allusions to the attempt at self-destruction; no contradiction; no reference to any *affaire du cœur* the young man might have; and which the doctor took for granted, after hearing some of his vague ravings, was a point of discussion between him and his uncle. All was to be placid around him; and, as far as was practicable with his restless nature, he was to be made to share that placidity.

And so it came to pass that Gertrude's name

was no more mentioned between them. No doubt Kenneth knew, when his uncle's frank countenance became clouded and wistful, that he was 'casting about' how to ask that which he nevertheless dreaded to hear. And no doubt Sir Douglas, when the brow of his nephew grew dark with an expression of dislike and distrust, felt instinctively that he was brooding over his imaginary wrongs in that respect, and paining his kindly relative by all sorts of cruel suspicions which, however undeserved, no explanation would be permitted to remove.

It was nevertheless a day of joy to both, when first Kenneth feebly descended the great stone staircase, and crossed from the Palazzo to the Villa Reale; leaning on his uncle's arm, and looking with dazed languid eyes at the million smiles of the rippling sea, and the fishermen's boats in the bay. And day by day, as his strength returned in slow measure, the same loving arm and patient heart were ready to give what help and solace body or mind was capable of receiving.

Once only they met Gertrude and her mother. Weary of the sights and sounds of the ever-restless Chiaja; of the rushing past of calessos and

carriages; of the shrill voices of petty vendors of roasted chestnuts, melons, sea-fish, and 'sea-fruit,' (as the little brown urchins call the non-descript creatures which, warm from the palms of their own dirty little hands, they propose to the stranger to buy and devour,) sick of the monotony of mingling with the stream of that life which he saw every day at a distance from the windows of his apartment—Kenneth requested to be driven to Baia.

At that turn in the road which presents the unequalled view of the bay and the island of Nisida, they halted and gazed on the scene, bathed in an aureole of golden sunset: and fell to talking of Italian prisons and Italian liberty—as many an Englishman has done, and will do again, in that spot of beauty and misery—

'Where all save the spirit of man is divine.'

Kenneth became excited, and then rather faint. There was a pause; and then, in a wilful peevish tone, he said, 'I don't know why we talk of these accursed things; let us go on the sands, a little further on; I am quite able for that; in fact, I am sure a walk on the sands would do me

good: and there, at least, there will be no shouting; no babble except the lapping of the little waves. I want to be alone; we shall be alone there.'

And lone enough the curved outline of the white sandy shore appeared in the distance; but hardly had they left the carriage a few yards behind them, when, at a sudden turn, they came face to face with Lady Charlotte Skifton and her daughter.

'Dear me!' said the former, 'we came here because we thought we should meet nobody; and who should we meet but the very persons——'

'Whom you were anxious to avoid?' said Kenneth, with a short laugh.

'No, indeed, nothing of the kind, I'm sure, Mr. Ross; and I'm extremely glad, on the contrary, to see you looking so much recovered; but the very persons we were talking about; for I was speaking of Sir Douglas to Gertie.'

'I hope you spoke in praise of me,' said the latter, with an attempt at playfulness, and an anxious glance at Gertrude.

'Oh, no!—I mean yes, of course—but, indeed, we were like the city of Zoar, you know;

neither hot nor cold—he, he, he,—I mean neither praising nor blaming—but just talking you over, and how ill you looked, and all that.’

Gertrude did not speak. She had offered her hand to Kenneth, who did not take it; and she extended it to Sir Douglas and withdrew it again, his eyes being now fixed on his nephew, apparently unconscious of her movement. Gertrude flushed painfully; Kenneth turned very pale; Sir Douglas strove in vain for a free and unembarrassed address. All stood silent.

‘Oh, dear!’ said Lady Charlotte, ‘I shall have to behave like the child’s book; I mean like the story; that is, like the old woman in the story, where the stick begins to beat the dog; and the dog begins to bite the rope—and—oh, dear! I can’t remember how it goes on: but Gertrude will remember it all; she used to say it by heart when she was a little child. I know, however, that all was set a-going that they might get home, you know, as we must!’

“Pig won’t get over the stile, and I shan’t
get home to-night,—”

that is the nursery rhyme.’

The girlish giggle with which she repeated

the verse, and the twirl she gave to the long ringlet, and all the little shades of ridicule that attached to all she said and did, were rather a relief than otherwise in the embarrassment of the moment. Kenneth laughed, and leaning heavily on his uncle's arm, made way for her to pass him. He even held out his hand to Gertrude; pressed hers; and then retreating a step backwards, muttered, 'I don't feel well; I should like to return to the carriage.'

Not a word did he speak during the drive homewards, and Sir Douglas forbore to chafe his spirit by any attempt at conversation. But each was aware of a shadow that fell over all objects as they drove along; and the few words spoken at parting were spoken with constraint, although on Sir Douglas's part they were only a promise to see him in the morning, and on Kenneth's 'Very well; yes; good-bye for the present.'

Then came again, for Sir Douglas, the mingled pain and pleasure of his quiet loving evening at the Villa Mandórlo. Lorimer Boyd was sitting with Gertrude when he came in. They were looking over maps in a small atlas that lay on the table.

‘Are you teaching Gertrude geography?’ asked Sir Douglas with a smile.

‘I should want many lessons, I am afraid,’ answered she, shutting the book hurriedly; ‘but Mr. Boyd would have plenty of patience with me.’

They chatted a while together, and then Lorimer Boyd took his leave. Lady Charlotte lay drowsily reading a little French novel on a sofa in the distance. Sir Douglas and his betrothed talked of Scotland; of his home; of the past; of the future; of wood-walks and mountain-walks which they were to take together; of all the good she was to do; and all the happiness she was to confer.

All of a sudden,—and, as it seemed to the startled girl, quite unaccountably,—in the midst of a description of Torrieburn Falls, his voice broke; and in a smothered and passionate tone he said:—

‘Oh, Gertrude! my Gertrude! do you know the meaning of your name? It means TRUE—true to your trust! There was a German Gertrude once, who clung through good and evil to her husband; and when, for some political offence, he was sentenced to be broken on the wheel, she sat

by him through the long night, moistening his lips in the torture of that terrible death, and speaking words of comfort to the last! *That was love.*

‘Do you fear, that if such a fate were possible for you, I should forsake you, Douglas?’

‘There are tortures, not of the body,—of the mind,—as difficult to bear.’

There was a pause. ‘You are thinking once more of Kenneth,’ said Gertrude, gently.

‘Yes, of Kenneth,’ he answered, eagerly; and eagerly he watched her face, for he thought to himself, ‘Now she will speak.’

But she turned away from his searching gaze, and sighed. Then turning towards him again with a sweet sad look, her eyes fell on his eyes, and she said rather reproachfully, ‘I have very little power over you, you rebellious lover; did I not tell you not to dwell on things said by poor Kenneth? that all was delirium!’

All? Was *all* delirium? That was exactly what Sir Douglas panted to know.

And Gertrude, believing that all that disturbed his mind must be a repetition of vague, angry threats,—not with any special reference to her, or

connected with any confession of love for her, but resulting from a general spirit of rebellion on the part of Kenneth against his uncle,—thought she did wisely and well in keeping her secret, and not permitting love for herself to sunder the love of those who had been so linked together; and with both of whom—not with Sir Douglas only—her future life must be connected, if she did her duty by all as she hoped to do.

When Sir Douglas bid her good night she looked wistfully in his face. ‘Come early to-morrow,’ she said, ‘Mamma is not well. Come early to-morrow.’

‘Yes; as soon as I have seen Kenneth.’

He was gone. And yet Gertrude did not retire to rest. Nor did she read or work or occupy herself in any way. Her mother kissed her languidly, with a little yawn, and a ‘Don’t sit up, dear; dream in your bed, if you will dream.’ But she did not obey the mandate. She sat watching and listening. She opened the glass doors that gave on the terraces; the warm night air breathed like a caress on her cheek and shoulder as she leaned against the trellis-work, rich with the perfume of flowers. Presently a

hurried step approached from the distance, and Lorimer Boyd returned.

‘Have you seen him and talked to him?’ whispered Gertrude.

‘Yes.’

‘And how did he take it?’

‘Very badly at first; he was wild and menacing and foolish, but sensibly enough at last.’

‘He agreed?’

‘Yes, he agreed. I found great difficulty in convincing him that it really was your wish, and he conditioned with me to bring him back one word from you—one written line as a proof. You are to write, “Farewell, Kenneth. It is better for you and for me; we are not parting for ever, only for a time.”’

‘I will write it directly—only’—she hesitated, ‘only let him clearly understand that, when we do meet again, I shall be a wife.’

‘Of course,’ said Lorimer Boyd hurriedly, and without looking towards her. ‘Give me the note, and I will return to him.’

She took the pen. ‘I cannot call him Kenneth. I have always called him Mr. Ross.

Mamma sometimes has called him by his Christian name, but I have not.'

'“Farewell, Kenneth Ross,” then; the main thing at this special time is to soothe him, if you wish him to agree to the plan proposed. Each man has his own distinct way of grieving. Trust me, if you were to write me a farewell in such circumstances, I would care little in what words it was couched. But he is wilful—different.'

'Farewell, Kenneth Ross. It is better for you,—for me,'—she hesitated over some mention of Sir Douglas, and wrote 'for you,—for me,—for *all*. We are parting only for a time, not for ever. Take care of your health. Yours always most truly—G. S.'

'There, give it to him. How can I thank you for all the trouble you take? But I know you think nothing of that, not only for my sake, but the sake of an older friend—Sir Douglas himself.'

'Yes; for your sake and his. God bless you; God bless you both, and give you both what happiness is attainable in this strange unstable world. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' answered the soft musical voice,

and the sweet eyes were lifted to his with a fond thankful expression. And the good-night words and good-night glance went on with Lorimer Boyd through the lonely pathway, to his final task for that evening by Kenneth's restless side, and into the solitude of his own habitation, where he could commune with his heart and be still.

Long he sat; his arms folded across his broad chest; his gaze abstractedly fixed on a litter of torn papers, and books of reference, heaped by his writing-table; wrapt in moody contemplation. The taper, burning by him on the desk, sank suddenly, and startled him from his reverie. He lit another at the dying flame, and rose to go to his bed-room. As he passed one of the tall mirrors let into the wall, and saw the spectre of himself reflected there with a sudden illumination, his lip curled with a grim smile.

'Well,' thought he, 'Kenneth Ross was an Adonis, if any man could lay claim to the title, and yet ——'

And so he passed to the shadow of slumber and the land of dreams, whither we cannot follow him.

CHAPTER XV.

Sans Adieu.

EARLY morning in the Bay of Naples! Have any of my readers seen it? Do they remember it? Can they forget it? Did the seeing of it seem to justify the boastful national saying, 'See Naples, and then die?'

The brightness of land and water; the beauty of outline, and of the vegetation that fills up those outlines; the glitter of white, green, scarlet, purple, and blue; of villas and palaces; gay vestments; snowy lateen sails, shooting like sudden smiles across the face of the sea; all the glory of Nature that hides, as with a bright screen, dirt, ignorance, poverty, misgovernment, and whatever else is faulty or painful in the condition of that careless people, for whom brave hearts have struggled and suffered, and are yet struggling; but

who, in their whole nature, resemble ill-brought-up children more than any other peasantry on the face of the globe. Even in their bursts of daring effort to right themselves politically, this may be seen. Our English Wat Tyler—the ‘Idol of the Clownes,’ as he is styled in old-fashioned accounts of that rebellion,—and William Tell, the hero of Helvetian romance,—rose, with men’s hearts, to do men’s work ; with a steady purpose, and, as far as is possible in ambitious human nature, with a certain abnegation of self in behalf of the general good. But Massaniello’s revolt, touching as is his story, was the barring-out of a school-boy sick of a tyrannical master ; tyrannical in his turn, and rebelled against in his turn, by companions yet more reckless and shortsighted than himself.

Even in their daily occupations—their slack uncertain industry, easily interrupted for any show or procession ; their ceaseless inattentive gabble ; their vehement disputes about trifles, when they should be seriously bent on the business of the hour,—this childishness is observable. Life, with them, seems a filling up of some irregular ill-passed holiday,—a holiday that has been

too long even for their own comfort, as we often see with children. There is no evidence of reality in what they do. They seem playing at everything. Playing at buying and selling; playing at mending nets; playing at oratory in one corner, and at building or carpenter's work in another. Even the women seem playing at washing, as they chase each other laughingly, or come carelessly along, swinging a basket of wet linen between them, passing barefooted over the bright sands, whose moist gleaming surface on a sunny day often reflects, as in a mirror, the feet and limbs and coloured raiment of the burden-carriers.

Their little nasal songs are the songs of children—monotonous, unfinished, with seldom as much thought and poetry as one Sir Douglas Ross smiled at, this special morning, as he wended his way to Kenneth's home, lingering and looking about him, enjoying the brightness and glory of that careless opening day.

The song he paused to listen to, was a corrupted version, very nasally sung, of a little poem by Tommaso Tommasi; not in the style of the grand yet sweet poetic line of the ever-wailing Petrarch,

‘Blessed be the time, the season, the hour;’ but with a tinge of comic humour in its tenderness.

‘My blessing’ (so it ran) ‘on the builder who built that house! My hearty blessing be upon him! many blessings in truth—many! Bless him for building that door, out of which you come, and into which I go! Bless him for framing that window, where I often see your dear face looking out! But above all may he be blest a thousand times over for making that nice little staircase, up which I can pass when I will, to see you and embrace you.’

The singer was a little brown urchin, so young that even in precocious Italy he could scarcely be supposed as yet to have any reason for blessing one architect more than another for enabling him to visit his love! He was perched astride on the keel of an upturned boat; his scarlet cap carelessly held in his hands, which rested on the boat in front of him, as he sat, jockey fashion, carolling his ditty with eager lungs, like a bird in the morning sun.

Sir Douglas tossed him a small piece of silver, which he caught in his cap with a nod and a

merry grin, but without dismounting from his throne on the keel. Beyond him sat a girl, (his sister apparently, from the resemblance between them,) weeping bitterly, and he leaned back with a wild grace, and made her an offer of the coin; repeating the ever-ready phrase of childhood to those in sorrow—‘Weep no more!’ But the girl continued sobbing; her breast heaved convulsively in its crimson bodice, and she was vainly stanching, with her stiff little embroidered apron, tears which fell without ceasing from most beautiful eyes—eyes whose lids seemed rather to be fringed with feathers from a bird’s wing than furnished with ordinary lashes, so thick and soft lay their shadow on her cheek.

At first Sir Douglas had made a movement to add to his benefaction, but he somehow intuitively felt that here was a sorrow which no amount of silver coin, nor even gold coin, could avail to comfort. He approached the stranded boat, and spoke a few words of compassion and inquiry. The boy slid down from his place, and drew his sister’s hands away from her face, that she might attend to the stranger; but, instead of answering, she also slid down, lithe as a branch of broken

woodbine,—and hastily flitted away over the sands. He could see her, still weeping; repulsing, with a little movement of her shoulder, the attempted consolations of some companions who crossed her path and turned pityingly towards her; till, spying in the distance the gaunt figure of an old weather-beaten woman, she ran rapidly forwards to meet her, and flung herself into the circling arms. Then both women, as of common accord, dropped down to the sands, and again embracing as they seated themselves, wept in concert.

‘*E la madre di Giuseppe!*’ muttered the boy, his own glittering black eyes suffused for a moment with sympathetic tears.

‘And where is Giuseppe?’

The boy pointed to the smoke of a steam-packet, trailing quietly on the calm air far out in the bay.

‘And is he your brother?’

No; he was the lover of Nanella—(this was told in the simplest way in the world)—and yesterday they were all as happy as possible, sailing in that very boat. And the boy gave a little kick backwards with his bare brown heel on the boat’s side, as he stood leaning against it and

facing the inquisitive stranger, to impress the situation on Sir Douglas.

Yes! all so happy only yesterday, and Nanella to be married in three days from this time; and now, as the saints and Madonna had permitted, Giuseppe had been tempted by the offers of a 'richissimo signor Inglese' to accompany him; had left Nanella and Naples and his mother, and had his head full of dreams of making a fine fortune, and not to be a fisherman any longer.

'But he will return, and then marry your sister, if he has a true heart.'

'Ah, signor! but sometimes from the sea one does not return at all, and the hearts, whether false or true, lie deep among the fishes! So Giuseppe's father lay,—after a great storm,—and therefore the old mother and Nanella weep. For my part' (and the glitter of the Southern smile returned to the boy's mobile countenance)—for my part, I only envy Giuseppe; it must be a grand thing to sail far, far, far away, and see strange people and ships, and bring home strange birds! Ah! if any great signor—if, for example, your Excellency—would say to me, 'Pepe, let us sail away together,' how readily would I say,

‘Yes! let us go—andiam, partiam!’ He gave an indolent look towards the sea, and then added, laughing, ‘It would not at least be my baggage that would detain me! Such *baule* as I saw lifted on the deck of the steamer before she was off! such shouting and scuffling, such tossing about of lights—for she was off at dawn of day, and there was much loading to be done first. I am sure Giuseppe alone lifted thirteen boxes. But I—ah! that would be another affair; I should take a slice of melon in my hand and step on board, and say to the Excellency,—“*Eccomi!*”’ *

‘I have a great mind to take you at your word,’ said Sir Douglas, laughing, as he looked on the little careless lad, who evidently thought it rather a convenience than otherwise to have what our shivering Northern mendicants term ‘nothing but what he stood upright in.’ ‘I have a great mind to take you with me to a very cold country, where I live when I am at home; but we must talk of it another time; the mother and Nanella would cry still more if you left them.’

‘Oh no, signor, Nanella would not care. Do take me!’

* ‘Here I am!’

And he followed Sir Douglas a few steps, as if hoping that his future destiny would be settled then and there, in another sentence or two.

‘No, no. I will think of it. Go now—do not follow me. Go and comfort Nanella.’

The little fisher-boy shook his head. Then he slowly returned to his boat, and casting himself on the sands was soon engaged in that lively game, the ‘gioco del moro,’ with companions as little in need of portmanteaus and *baule* to pack their clothes in, as his half-naked self; and quite as ready for any chance start in life: while Sir Douglas quickened his steps to reach the Palazzo on the Chiaja,—musing as he went on the contrasts of sorrow in luxury,—such as existed there; and sorrow in poverty,—such as he had just left.

Upon the whole, Heaven’s visitations are more even than they seem. The golden shields of heroes, embossed and decorated and worked with strange devices, protected life no better than the common soldier’s; and the arrows of fate still strike home to the heart, whether the breast lie bare to the sunshine like poor little Pepe’s, or be clothed in ‘purple and fine linen.’

Nothing could be more commonplace than

these reflections of Sir Douglas's: but they are commonplace because they are universally true; and they absorbed him so entirely, that he was still occupied with the immense despair caused by the departure of some obscure and nameless fisherman in the hearts of that girl and woman weeping on the sands, when the last step of the staircase was reached, and he stood on the landing of Kenneth's apartment.

The door of that apartment was wide open; and, as he entered, Sir Douglas was startled by the peculiar aspect of the rooms. Every one knows the look of rooms from which the habitual occupant has just flitted. The torn nest of a bird does not tell its story more clearly. 'Packed up and gone away,' is written on all the little nameless shreds of litter—the scraps of paper and string; the chairs standing in unusually irregular positions; the beds unmade, because about to be stripped; the doors all ajar; and the odd silence that seems to pervade the place where customary voices sound no longer: all seeming dumbly to impress upon us, 'Those you seek *were* here, but they have departed!'

Only a minute or two of bewilderment elapsed

before another step sounded on the bare stone staircase, and the conceited cigar-smoking valet, whom Sir Douglas recollected on his first visit to Kenneth, entered; extremely moody and crestfallen.

‘Where is your master?’ asked Sir Douglas.

‘Eh! Chi lo sa!’ All he knew was that the young Excellency had asked for the accounts the previous evening; had scarcely looked at them, saying that he had much headache that night; had paid him without a word, and had bid him pack up his things immediately! That at first he had thought the young Excellency was again in delirium, but that he insisted, and the Signor Boyd, who had been with the young Excellency, had remarked nothing extraordinary; but bid him good night as usual after much talk.

That he had accordingly obeyed, and packed all but his Excellency’s music, which his Excellency angrily said he did not want, and in fact struck the guitar so passionately that it ‘burst asunder with a great sound.’ That after all this, the young Excellency’s things were carried down to the port and put on the boats to be carried to one of the large steamers; and that at the very last moment, when the valet was preparing also

to add his own things, gathered together as he averred in most uncomfortable haste, the young Excellency had told him he need give himself no such trouble, for that he intended to take with him Giuseppe the coral-diver, who had fished him out of the water the day his Excellency might remember,—the day of the accident which was followed by the dreadful illness from which the young Excellency was only just recovered. That Giuseppe had only laughed at the expostulation made by him—the valet—and had said that he would nurse the Signor Inglese as if he were a baby at the breast, and that he did not require any more a valet who was not a courier, nor a courier who was not a sailor. And any more than these particulars he, the valet, could not narrate, being ‘stordito’ with all that had occurred, and knowing no more than he had had the honour to explain to his Excellency.

Was there no note—no message? Sir Douglas asked. Did Mr. Kenneth Ross not mention *him* before starting?

Not a word. There was indeed a note; but to Mr. Boyd, not to his present Excellency; a note which he had just delivered, and which

appeared to cause much surprise and displeasure to the Signor Boyd, who was leaving the Chancellerie and following him to the apartment.

In a minute or two more Lorimer Boyd entered.

‘You know something of this. You have a note from him. What does it all mean?’ groaned Sir Douglas. ‘You—is it possible you have known he was going? advised him to go? Where is his note? What does he say? My God, what has driven him to this?’

‘My dear Douglas, pray be calm; this graceless creature does things in a way no one but himself could dream of. I admit counselling him to continue his travels—he is now sufficiently recovered—’

‘Oh no—good Heavens, no!—he was as weak as water yesterday. Oh, Lorimer, who could have thought—’

‘He is enduring no fatigue; he is at sea, in an excellent steamer, with a surgeon on board. How could I guess he would depart so, without a word of farewell? I did not expect it this week. I have only this moment received his note.’

‘What does he say? read me the poor boy’s note. O God! this is a bitter way of parting!’

‘His note, Douglas—his note—is of a piece with all the rest of his conduct to you; forgive me if I say his utterly selfish and ungrateful conduct. Here it is: but be assured whatever your anxious mind may fancy about him, he is not only well enough to start, but a thousand times more likely to recover health and equanimity away from these scenes, than by remaining here fretting you and himself, and falling back, as soon as recovered, into scenes of Neapolitan dissipation and extravagance.’

‘His note—give me his note.’

Lorimer Boyd handed it to his friend with a sigh of mingled impatience and compassion, and Sir Douglas read it.

‘MY DEAR BOYD,—I don’t find I have much nerve or heart for any more farewelling,—so this is to tell you I am off! Tell my uncle so. Say all that is proper from me to him; and that I am much obliged for all his care and attention during my illness, &c. The fewer words the better. I can’t tell him, or you, my plans, because I have not yet made any; but I have taken Giuseppe with me, who speaks Greek, and is a much more

spirited and likely sort of fellow than the d——d yawning valet I got saddled with, when I first arrived in Naples. He has been to Alexandria, too, and up the Nile, and to Spain, and America, and some place in every point of the compass, if one is to believe him, which I am quite willing to do. You will all hear of me sooner or later. In the meanwhile I am better away. “Gone on the grand tour,” like the young gentlemen in old-fashioned novels. You may quote, perhaps, your favourite *larmoyant* Petrarch:—

“Lo star mi strugge,—e’l fuggir non m’aita,” &c. &c. *

But I have been uncomfortable enough lately, to think any change a change for the better! Old Sir Douglas was all for my travelling, when I was for remaining in England or Scotland; and now I’m all for beginning a vagabond life, and spending a year or two in seeing the world. Who knows but I may be the better for it; and come back as sage as Solon, and infinitely better company? Let us hope so.

‘Yours very truly,

‘KENNETH ROSS.

* “Staying is anguish,—going, no relief.”

‘P.S.—Louis, the valet, is paid, and overpaid; so don’t let him come down upon Sir Douglas with any pretended claims; except for a character, for which I have told him he may refer to *you*.

‘His accounts were a farce; but he is not a greater rogue than all his *semblables*. One does not expect principle in any of them; only to be knowing in their calling, get one rapidly through the bore of dressing, and be punctual in taking and delivering notes; and I must say I had no reason to complain of this fellow, in any of these particulars. You may say that I recommend him.

‘K. R.’

Sir Douglas dropped the hand which held the note, and sighed bitterly.

‘Without a farewell!’ he said. ‘Without one word of farewell!’

‘Oh, be reasonable, Douglas! Was he not always the same from boyhood? Was he ever considerate or grateful? Come away from this place. Come’ (and the words seemed spoken with hesitation) ‘to the Villa Mandórlo with me. Come!’

‘Not now—not now. I must go home first.

I am willing to think you acted for the best,—but my heart aches to think of my poor wayward lad: ill and gone. Ill! He may have thought I wished him gone. His note is so odd!’ And again the dejected eyes ran through the cold and careless lines, as if seeking for something they could not find there.

‘I should be sorry if he thought *I* had desired his absence?’ And Sir Douglas looked up in a questioning manner into Lorimer’s face.

Gloomy displeasure was struggling with tenderer feeling on Lorimer’s brow. A tinge of scorn was in his voice and manner, as he answered,—

‘I fear his thinking you desired his absence would only have made him more willing to remain. Douglas, you are a self-tormentor! you were so even as a boy. I will stake my experience of men and things against yours, that in those days your father and brother never suffered one tithe of what *you* suffered, attributing to them feelings, and motives, and vexations, and mortifications, which never occurred to them, though they occurred to you, and though most certainly they would have haunted you had you stood in their place. For Heaven’s sake, try

and put aside your own view of this day's mischance! Kenneth ought not to have done what he has done; he should have gone this day week, after preparing you—after asking your guidance and advice—after bidding you a kindly and grateful farewell. What then? It is not in him! And the very want of natural tenderness that prevented his seeing that this was the proper course for him to pursue, prevents him at this moment from suffering. I would wager any money that he is at this moment—while you are grieving here—lying on the deck in the sunshine, smoking a cigar; recovering from the very slight degree of fatigue that active and capable fellow Giuseppe would have permitted him to endure; enjoying the morning breeze at sea,—and thinking far more of how the change will answer to *him*, than of any of the effects the suddenness of his departure may have upon us. I will call an hour hence at your hotel, and we will walk to Santa Lucia together; or will you come to the Chancellerie?’

‘No; I will wait for you at the hotel. I had rather be alone for a little. Alone—even from you, Lorimer.’

As he spoke he held out his hand, and the two friends parted. Lorimer Boyd looked sadly, and somewhat sternly, after the tenderer, less resolute man ; and Sir Douglas, looking sorrowfully out over the sea, in the direction where the smoke of the vanished steamer had been visible in the earlier morning, repeated to himself in a choked voice,—

‘ Without a word of farewell or explanation !’

The little brown fisher-boy was still playing on the sands. Nanella was still sitting, her head drooping, disconsolate and silent, by the side of the older woman, who was spinning from a distaff, from habit, mechanically, and with hard-set lines of grieving round her mouth, but without any outward show of emotion.

How little, when he pitied the girl and laughed with the boy that morning, had Sir Douglas imagined their sorrow would be linked with his sorrow, and that the departure of Giuseppe would seem also to *him* an event disturbing all the tranquillity of that day, and many a day to come, till news could arrive of the wanderer !

CHAPTER XVI.

Alcyone.

LORIMER BOYD had time before he re-joined Sir Douglas to inform the inhabitants of the Villa Mandórlo of the very sudden departure of Kenneth. The maps which he and Gertrude had been looking at, the night before, with a view to sketching out some plan of travel for him,—and allowing him to propose it to his uncle himself,—still lay on the table, with marks of the different routes by land and sea, which Lorimer had thought likeliest to interest him. Gertrude felt quite guilty as she looked at them; as if she had planned not only his departure, but the manner of it. Lady Charlotte saw the matter in the serenest light of unmitigated rejoicing.

‘ Dear me! Well, I never expected Mr. Kenneth would have given so little trouble. I

thought he would have come here like Beauty and the Beast,—I mean like the beast that was a prince in reality, you know, in that story; for of course, we must all allow Mr. Ross himself to be a beauty: I thought he would come moaning and complaining to Gertrude (he certainly was moaning and complaining the day you and he were talking so loud together, my dear); and then afterwards being ill, or pretending to be very ill; which is exactly what the Beast-Prince did, if you recollect, Gertrude! Indeed, *he* pretended to be dying, in a corner of the garden,—to excite pity, you know. Men are so fond of exciting pity; and they are so very obstinate when one can't like them; wonderfully obstinate they are! I remember a Sir John Evans, who was in love with my sister; such a red-faced, loud, bull-voiced sort of a man, and *he* wouldn't give up, though mamma and I told him over and over again it was of no use proposing; and he kept saying in such a voice,—a voice like a trombone at the play,—“I will make you *so* happy, my dear!”—and my sister answered so sensibly, “I don't want to be happy, if you are to make me so, Sir John; I wish to be happy my

own way ;” and then like the Beast-Prince (and like Kenneth Ross), he said he was ill, and was quite broken-hearted ; as if a man *could* be broken-hearted who had such a voice, and went about in a dress that looked like an old jockey’s ! And when he heard she was going to marry somebody else, he swore the most horrid oaths,—and then in about a month he came to mamma and told her he also was going to marry somebody else : and in his big voice he said something about “ hitting the right nail on the head at last,” and “ not wearing the willow ;” and that he had made the girl’s acquaintance at a meet of the hounds on a Thursday, and proposed for her on the Saturday, because it never did to crane when you were going to take a leap !’

‘ Now what good would it have been to pity *him* ? None at all ; and you see he didn’t really require it : and I don’t pity Kenneth. Surely *you* ain’t going to pity Kenneth ?’ added she, with a sudden break in her long monologue, seeing her daughter’s abstracted eyes, which were fixed on the atlas on the table, gradually filling with tears.

‘ No, mamma,’ said Gertrude, smiling through the glittering drops, and wiping them away,—

‘I was not pitying Mr. Kenneth Ross, but thinking of his uncle. I know this suddenness will vex him; will cut him to the heart.’

‘Well, now, really, Gertie,’ interposed Lady Charlotte, with more warmth than usual, ‘you will spoil Sir Douglas. You should never spoil men, and you should never pity them; because then they don’t care half so much about you. I assure you they don’t.’ And she gave a meditative twirl to the long ringlet; slightly nibbled the end of it, and continued very gravely,— ‘And I would be particularly cautious about spoiling Sir Douglas, if I were you, because it will make him think himself so very superior,— in fact, he *is* very superior; but then, you know, he must be very foolish in some little corner of his brain, if he is sorry that Kenneth is gone; when we are all so very glad, and he ought to be glad too. I am sure, as for me, I could dance for joy! I could, indeed; only, of course, Sir Douglas would be shocked; and I don’t wish to shock him. Now here he comes, Gertrude; and I do hope you won’t be so silly as to seem sorry; because there really is nothing to be sorry about.’

But Gertrude comprehended better than her

garrulous parent, that in spite of the relief of Kenneth's much-desired absence, there *was* something to be sorry about; and she received Sir Douglas with a degree of sympathetic tenderness which perhaps was the only true balm his wounded heart was at that time capable of receiving.

Then followed days of such peace and close communion that the hearts of both must have been cast in strangely different mould from other human beings, if happiness had not predominated in them. And though Gertrude, in the first hours of that anxiety so hard to bear, which had visited Sir Douglas, shared with him the pang and soothed its bitterness,—the natural gladness consequent on relief from constraint, embarrassment, and a certain degree of terror with which Kenneth's wild threats had possessed her, shone out in a little while like sunshine after a storm.

Her gladness was new witchery in Sir Douglas's eyes. He had seen her tender, passionate, indignant, comforting; but he had never seen her playful—never in the pretty mood of 'girlish spirits;' and, like all men who have led busy

lives among grave interests, it was a welcome and a pleasant thing to him: one charm the more where all was already so charming. He was surprised at his own cheerfulness, but even the ever-recurring anxiety about Kenneth could not make him otherwise than cheerful. And the step that Gertrude listened for every day with increasing fervour of welcome, every day came glad and alert to the door of that villa whose architect he could have found it in his heart to bless, even in the words of little brown Pepe's nasal song.

At length they had news of the wanderer. In the midst of their preparations for leaving Naples, a letter arrived, not from Kenneth—whether too angry, or too lazy, or too careless to write—but from the hero of Nanella's heart, the coral-diver, Giuseppe. And in truth not written even by him, for whatever other perfections culminated in that much-lamented lover, he could not write his own love-letters, or indeed write at all, beyond a very curious and elaborate attempt at signing his name.

Few Italians in the lower classes, and few indeed in the middle classes, think it all incumbent on them to write their own letters. Their

most secret thoughts, their most affectionate avowals, their most important business—all these topics for correspondence are given over to the Scriváno, or public letter-writer, who may be seen often plying his vocation at the corner of the public street.

Diversity of style need not be looked for. The compositions resemble each other nearly as closely as the pattern epistles which are to be found in those old-fashioned guides to epistolary excellence, the *Complete Letter-writers*. In which works may be found gravely set down for copying such a list as the following:—

To a young lady, demanding her hand in marriage.

To the same, after her acceptance of your suit.

Ditto after rejecting it.

Ditto to bid her farewell.

To an amorous gentleman, repulsing his advances.

To the same, according him a meeting.

To a merchant trafficking in foreign wares and china.

To a lady who has lost her husband in the wars.

And so on, *ad infinitum*.

But at least these published models of how you ought to express your secret sentiments, admit of private selection. Not so the aid invoked from the Scriváno; you must inform him *vivá voce* of your dearest thoughts, and desire him passionately to implore a return of your love, while he tranquilly listens and takes a pinch of snuff. You must do this too, very often, not only in the hearing of the Scriváno (whom, of course, you intend shall hear you), but in the hearing of some *dolce far niente* bystander, who pauses to amuse his mind through his ear, without reference to your pleasure; or some other would-be correspondent, who waits discontentedly to say what *he* has to say till you have finished what *you* have to say,—wondering at your passion and your prosiness,—longing to spur you into a more rapid wind-up of your love or your anger, and pouring into the ear of the unmoved Scriváno some totally different subject of thought, before the latter has done sprinkling sand over the moist inky messages of affection you have just paid him to despatch.

Some snuffy old poulterer, anxious to know the market-price of quails and redlegged partridges

by the dozen, nudges away perhaps a young girl whose eyes are full of tears and whose heart is full of sorrow ; and in his turn is nudged away by some stalwart youth like Giuseppe ; who, cheerily looking out during the time of his brief dictation, pays with a gay smile for what the Scriv no may think a proper proportion of the language of love and despair ; in a letter in which there is often as little real sadness as there is in the nightingale's song, but to which the living ' Complete Letter-writer ' gives that conventional turn, without which neither the sender nor the recipient would be contented.

Nor are they contented very easily, to judge by the high-flown phrases which adorn some of these epistles ; seeming to prove that the more exaggerated the hyperbole, the better in their opinion is the style.

A young fisherman in Giuseppe's situation, advances and desires the Scriv no at Messina immediately to inform Miss Nanella at Naples that he is, he thanks Heaven, in good health, and hopes she is the same. That his master is in improved health ; rich, and liberal. He is sorry to have left her at such short notice ; but

it was a good chance, and it would have been madness to lose it. He will marry her on his return. At present they travel in foreign lands—to Tunis or to Greece—he knows not where. She is to be cheerful, and embrace his mother, who is in return also to embrace her,—and he remains ‘her own Giuseppe.’

From this small egg, the Scriváno will produce the astonishing ‘Pharaoh’s Serpent’ of an epistle such as the aforesaid Nanella confided to Sir Douglas, with tears of joy and thankfulness and many claspings and unclaspings of her little brown hands, and glad clappings of the same; and on the return of the precious missive, dropped it into her bodice; gave it a final pressure of affection there; and ran lightly away, all smiles, to read it once more (for the twentieth time) with the equally exultant weather-beaten old mother.

Giuseppe’s terse and abridged sentiments were thus rendered by the accomplished and fluent Scriváno:—

‘My ever beloved, regretted, and every-moment-of-the-day-and-night-sighed-for, Nanella!

‘Tears,—hot and constantly dropping,—almost effaced for me, after we separated, the heavenly shores of Naples. My heart appeared as if about to burst in two; leaving you the one half, and the other, only, going with your miserable Giuseppe! Scarcely could I believe it was day, so dark did all things seem around me: but the fortune of poverty is to be torn from what it loves, because it is a necessity with the poor to earn! The riches of the English Signor are immense; and so also is his liberality; and for that reason only, I adopted with anguish the step of going on board the departing steamer.

‘Do not suppose, my Nanella, that my love can be at all shaken by the great storms which the saints and the Madonna thus permit to try the ever-faithful and at-this-hour-almost-completely-drowned-in-sorrow heart of your Giuseppe! At my return we will kneel together before the excellent priest, and obtain for our by-me-so-much-longed-for union, the everlasting consent of an approving and overlooking Heaven!

‘The youthful Signor who was ill at Naples is reinigorated by the much-bestarred clear nights and breeze-adorned-and-refreshed days he has

lately passed. His Excellency's plans of travel are still unsettled. One day he will speak of sailing for Tunis, another day he will hold that it would greatly divert his mind to seek the shores of the country of Greece. Faithful to the duties imposed on me when the Signor Inglese entered into a convention that I should accompany him, I shall,—before the all-seeing eye of a just Providence, and under the approbation of the saint whose name I bear,—together with the assistance of the angels of succour,—continue to travel wherever the Signor is pleased to appoint.

‘Adieu, my Nanella, Nanellina—adieu! Embrace for me my beloved, worthy, and ever-respected mother, to whom shall be my next letter. Let her also embrace you for me. As many as there are stars out on a great night in summer, so many kisses I deposit on your much-desired cheek! Keep me in your heart and mind, and give to all asking friends the assurance of my entire health and contentment. Strive also to merit the blessing of Heaven by a cheerful spirit. It will seem to me a thousand years till I see you again, and embrace you in very truth!

‘Your GIUSEPPE.’

CHAPTER XVII.

The Crowning Joy.

MORE letters (in the same florid style) from the absent Giuseppe, and one or two briefer missives from Kenneth—both to his uncle and to Lorimer Boyd—sufficed to set their minds at rest, at all events as to the health and present well-doing of the wayward object of so much anxiety. He was tolerably thankful for a general settlement of his difficulties, which, without greatly trenching on his future, and with some renewed sacrifice on the part of his uncle, the latter had effected. He was amused and ‘improved,’ as he assured them, by his scheme of travel; and the period of his eventual return was left in the vaguest uncertainty,—to Lady Charlotte’s intense satisfaction.

Once only he alluded to Gertrude, and then

not in the honest earnest manner which Sir Douglas would have given worlds to read; but with a flippant affectation of carelessness that wounded more than if her name had never been mentioned.

‘Remember me,’ he said, ‘to the Skiftons. Lay me at the feet of my aunt that is to be. If I find in my travels some “pearl of price,” I shall garner it up as a wedding gift. Meanwhile my best wishes are hers, for her future health and prosperity. If you let me know the day of the happy event, I will

“tak’ a stoup o’ kindness yet,”

and drink everybody’s good health. I am always glad, as you know, of an opportunity of health-drinking; and believe it to be much more conducive to my own health, than water-drinking Mr. Boyd or temperate Uncle Douglas choose to admit.’

Sir Douglas sighed as he read the careless lines; but his sighs were checked by the spirit of contentment which pervaded his days. ‘Full measure, pressed down, and running over,’ seemed the sum of his happiness. The more he saw of Gertrude the more he loved her; the more he

rejoiced in the blessed good fortune that had made her return his love; the more he blest the sweet eyes that were to shine over his future, and light the lovely but lonely walks and halls of Glenrossie Castle.

Their parting was near. Their first parting since they had agreed to be united for ever; their last parting till the time when that union should be made sure, by the solemn ceremony that was to pronounce them one 'till death do us part.'

Death—only death!

Sir Douglas was to go to Scotland; to Glenrossie; to give directions, and settle much that needed arrangement previous to bringing there the new lady of the castle. And Lady Charlotte was to go to London, to see many old friends (and some new ones), who rather grudged her the success of her chaperonage during her somewhat forlorn widowhood.

For they had heard that Gertrude Skifton—'who, after all, was no such great beauty'—had captivated one of the richest of the Scotch baronets, though she had failed with the Prince Colonna; and they thought 'the poor, silly

creature' who had married the nameless Skifton, had had a success somewhat beyond her deserts.

Several young ladies of the highest lineage and most unimpeachable beauty had been 'going about' in the very best society for several seasons without any such desirable result; and, altogether, the sudden arrival of their old friend,—with a ready-made stock of happiness and wealth for a daughter of 'Mr. Skifton, deceased,' whom they had never made up their mind to patronise,—and who now obviously did not require their patronising,—showed rather in the light of a grievance than as a subject of congratulation.

The excessive simplicity, too, of Gertrude did not suit them. The real, natural, unaffected, innocent independence of her manner; anxious for nothing, resenting nothing, did not please them. Some said she was haughty; and some said that she was dowdy; and some that 'she seemed to be as great a fool as her mother.'

The stately handsome mature bridegroom was also the subject of captious remark. Some laughed at the wily widow 'catching' him for her daughter. Some thought that really the girl was not amiss, and might have done better than marry a

man twice her age. Some affected to be mightily amused and tickled at the story of Old Sir Douglas going out to Italy to lecture his scapegrace nephew, and being caught in the toils himself, and brought home captive. Some said he had 'behaved abominably to the young man; persuaded the mother to reject his suit, and then made love to the daughter on his own account.' Some were of opinion that the mother and daughter were two *intrigantes*, who had thrown over the nephew when they found they could entrap the uncle, and 'wheedled' a confirmed old bachelor till they brought him to the point of matrimony.

When was there ever any marriage arranged, which bitter tongues did not slur,—and idle tongues canvass,—and envious tongues find fault with,—and careless tongues discuss? Proving only, in the slurring, canvassing, fault-finding, and discussing, the great mystery of preference; and the impossibility of common-place understandings being brought to feel that such preference is God's inspiration, and not a scheme of man's making,—ruled like a map or an account-book, with the set boundaries of the one, or the ap-

portioned valuing of the other, to regulate the result.

‘Why did she love him? Curious fool, be still.
Is human love the growth of human will?’

No—nor of human comprehension. Those who love would fain escape, it may be, from the thrall. Those who do *not* love would give the world to be able to bend and bow their hearts and imaginations to the choice that would ‘answer’ in all respects,—the choice that would do them credit,—that would promote their worldly advancement,—that would satisfy friends and prudence, and their own predetermined rules.

It cannot be! Love steps in, with a smiling mastery, and waves the magic wand which makes them tremble and obey! Love—the great magician—by the light of whose lamp palaces arise brighter than Aladdin’s; at whose bidding voices more melodious than Ariel’s, sound his sweet chorus of ‘Follow! Follow!’ whose luring from common-place things may end in wrecking us; but rapturous are the hours first passed; sailing with the tide, down the rapid river of unreturning time!

Gertrude was sailing down that stream ; lit by the warm sunshine of joy, and lulled by the music of its rippling waves.

Lady Charlotte was made a little restless and unhappy : both by the ironical jealousies we have alluded to ; the great desire she had to collect together all sorts of titled relations and guests ; and the extreme reluctance of the bridegroom to be made ' a public spectacle,' as he termed it. A reluctance which Gertrude seemed fully to share—and to yield only from love of her mother, to the desire of the latter for the pomps and ceremonies of the nuptial day.

The day came ; and the guests. That agitated and agitating vision of bridal vestments, murmured replies at the altar, blushing bridesmaids, and a veiled bride,—the sobbing kiss, the hurried departure,—the cheers of the mob gathered round the doors, and the blank silence afterwards in spite of crowds and tumultuous chattering, which mark the progress of a ' Wedding Day,'—were all gone through,—as they have been gone through a million times, and will be gone through a million and a million times more. And before Lady Charlotte's weak, vain, loving heart had

recovered from its agitation, 'Sir Douglas and Lady Ross' were off on their way to Glenrossie.

On their way to Glenrossie! Ah! what other rapture, what other fulness of joy, shall compare to the day, when the woman who loves deeply and truly, is borne to the home of the man she so loves?

For ever! The human 'for-ever'—the for-ever 'till death do us part,' how it stretches out its illimitable future of joy, as we sit, hand linked in hand, sure of each other, of existence, of love, of all that makes a paradise of earth; and the hedges and boundaries that divide lands, flee past before our dreaming eyes; and the morning sun glows into noon; and the noon burns and fades; and the day sinks again, with a crimson haze, into sunset—and perhaps the sweet and quiet light—the pale light of the moon—swims up into that sea of blue, men call the sky; while still we are journeying on to the one spot on earth where we have cast our anchor of hope; to the trees and lawns, and rocks and hills, and gardens of flowers, and paths of delight, which *were* till now all HIS: but since the morning are OURS!—the place we have loved without ever seeing it, per-

haps,—the place that saw his boyhood ; where his people drew breath ; where his dear ones have lived and died ; where *we* hope to live and die—Home ! The blessed word—HOME !

So, in the shadows and lights of one of the sweetest nights of English summer, Sir Douglas Ross and Gertrude journeyed on ; so, in the clear moonlight of the advanced hours, they drove through the solemn darkened approach, scented with the aromatic odour of the pine-trees ; and so, the journey ending at last, Sir Douglas turned to his new-made bride,—before the bustle of entrance and welcome, the barking of dogs, the ringing of bells, the flutter and hurry of welcome and reception, should break in on their silent dream of joy,—and passionately kissing her cheek, murmured softly in her ear as he led her in, ‘ God bless this day to both of us ! May you be happy here, my Gertrude, and never regret the day that made you mine for ever ! ’

For ever !

CHAPTER XVIII.

Paradise.

GLENROSSIE was Paradise. For many and many a day after Gertrude had crossed the threshold of that stately castle, she firmly believed that no other home so perfect had ever opened upon bridal eyes. The extraordinary beauty of that wild scenery; blue lake, brown mountain and wild foaming stream ending in abrupt waterfalls; the stately growth of the incense-breathing old fir-trees; the ceaseless change of prospect from different mountain paths; the glad welcome of the old tenantry to 'the lady' of their long absent master; the delicious power of helping; of visiting the poor, and blind, and sick, and bed-ridden, and being able to alter their degrees of suffering, and act as an inferior Providence in favour of those obscure and uncared-for destinies;

with the sunshine of love and approval over all she said, did, or planned, from the enamoured Sir Douglas ;—left nothing to desire of happiness in Gertrude's heart.

And then, very slowly, very quietly, very unexpectedly, and yet very clearly, she awoke to the perception that in her Paradise there was a snake. Not a great magnificent satanic snake. Not a serpent with a cherub's head, as in the old pictures ; coiling round the smooth-stemmed trees, glittering and rippling with a river-like movement in its gliding body and varnished skin. Not a python of strange majesty and power, disputing the sense of Heaven's clear revelations, and undermining the authority of its ordinances, by words of seeming wisdom voluble and sweet as those dim oracles which the priesthood of Apollo sent through metal tubes to make the heathen altars seem divine. Not a creature that awed and yet fascinated ; whose presence was a mystery, and its counsel almost a scornful command. But a little sliding, slithering, mean, small snake : a 'snake in the grass : ' a snake whose tiny bite the heel might almost carelessly spurn when it seemed to pursue, and whose power to wound might be

doubted and smiled over, till the miracle of death by its venom were irrevocably proved !' A snake that looked like a harmless eft.

Nothing but the instinctive repulsion which exists in certain natures to reptiles even when unseen, their presence being discoverable to the inner soul of feeling though not to the outward sense, could have inspired Gertrude with the aversion she gradually felt for Sir Douglas's half-sister, Alice Ross.

Alice had not offended the bride ; on the contrary she flattered her ; she obviously endeavoured to please, to wind round her, to become necessary to her. She went beyond the mere yielding up gracefully the small delegated authority which for many years she had seemed to exercise, from being ' the only one of the family resident at the Castle.' She was not satisfied with dropping to the condition of friend and equal ; she rather assumed that of poor relation and humble companion. She chose toleration, and repudiated welcome. As to the near connexion between herself and Sir Douglas, she always alluded to it in a humble, half-mournful, apologetic manner, as if it were a fault, but not *her* fault ; and yet a fault

for which she was willing to make amends to the extent of her feeble powers. She behaved towards him as towards one who was to be admired, revered, wondered at;—but to *love* him would be taking too great a liberty. Still, in her own subservient way she contrived to impress him with a notion of humble worship: and she lost no opportunity of increasing that impression even while she deprecated all evidences of its ruling spirit in her mind.

The very first evening they were all seated at the oaken table where books, and flowers, and carpet-work lay in crowded companionship; she softly gathered together, with a little trembling sigh, a sort of select harvest from among the books; saying, with the slow Highland drawl peculiar to some Scotch voices:—

‘I should have moved these before; for I count them as my very own; but they have lain here so long! Of course I know nothing of military matters, even now; but I have made quite a collection of books about armour, and about forces in different countries, and fortifications of various kinds—and histories of battles! I have a pedlar’s pack of them; Gustavus of

Sweden, with no end of plates; and I have even got,—you will laugh,—I have even got a great big volume called the ‘Tactics of Elian;’ showing all the modes of disposing armies in the Greek and Roman days.’

‘The Tactics of Elian! What upon earth were they?’ said Gertrude, laughing.

‘Well, I cannot explain it better than I have done,—in my simple way,’—drawled Alice. ‘The book shows how they led armies into the field, and how they placed their troops. I have been so accustomed to think of a soldier’s life in all ways’ (and here she looked deprecatingly towards Sir Douglas), ‘that no book about it seemed dull to me; and I found very curious things. Such cruel things! Think of instructions how to take a fort in two several ways; one way if you are obliged to consider the lives of your men (how many of them are killed, in fact); and another way if you “can afford to expend men;” yes, that is the exact expression; I remember it; it shocked me to think of the calculation. A cruel life, but a brave life,’—and again she looked at her half-brother, who was smiling with an amused expression, as she slowly delivered her little oration.

‘And have you studied these military grammars, so that you could undertake these tasks?’

‘Yes, I think I could take a fort,’ she answered, in a grave deliberate unconscious manner.

‘And a bridge?’

‘Yes—a bridge. And I could construct a pontoon,—and move troops across the marshes.’ (Which she pronounced *mairshes*.)

‘What a pity you were not born a generation earlier, Alice, and that your abilities were not employed in the disastrous retreat from Walcheren!’

‘Well, I just forbode that you would laugh at me,’—she said, with the same placid drawl; ‘and so I do not mind; and I’ll carry away my books, and put them in the shelves of the Tower-room. I’ve never changed my room, you know: perhaps I should change it now? If Lady Ross thinks—when she goes over the castle’—and here she made one of her faces of humble deprecating inquiry, and paused.

‘Oh! dear no,’ said Gertrude, eagerly: and ‘Oh! no, no,’ broke in Sir Douglas with equal warmth. ‘You’ve lived there all your life; I should be sorry indeed, if now—’

‘And I should be sorry,’ said Gertrude, with

a kindly smile, 'that my coming should have such a disagreeable result. I hope, unless the day should come when you would leave us and the Tower-room, for some *very* pleasant reason, that it will be home, as it has always been.'

A glance sharper than at all agreed with the drawling quiet voice, shot from Alice's grey eyes; a glance of doubtful inquiry: and then she demurely replied:—

'It is not very probable, after so many years, that I should have the reason for leaving which you think so pleasant, Lady Ross.'

The bride was young and quick of feeling, and she looked down and blushed very red; for she did not know how to get over her little difficulty. She knew that when she spoke, with her sweet, cordial smile, of some 'very pleasant reason' for leaving, she meant if Alice went away to be married, and she comprehended that her new sister-in-law had doubted whether she meant this speech in all sincerity: since Alice was certainly what in common parlance is called, even when the party still retains claims to personal attraction, 'an old maid.'

Alice *did* retain claims to personal attraction:

her well-shaped head,—though its banded hair was of that disagreeable dry drab colour, which had not yet the advantage of our modern fashion of being dyed of a golden red,—surmounted a long, slender white throat; and a figure which, if somewhat too spare for artistic notions of beauty, was, as her maid expressed it, ‘jimp and genteel.’

She moved (as she spoke) with slow precision; and not without some degree of grace. The only positively disagreeable thing about her, was a certain watchfulness, which disturbed and fascinated you. Do what you would, Alice’s eyes were on you. You felt them fixed on your shoulder; your forehead; the back of your head; your hands; your feet; the sheet of paper on which you were writing a letter; the title and outside cover of the book you were reading; the harmless list you were making out of your day’s shopping; the anxious calculation of your year’s income; and the little vague sketch you scribbled while your mind was occupied about other things.

I have spoken of her as the snake in this Paradise; but there was something essentially *feline*, also, in her whole manner; and indeed the cat is, among inferior animals, what the snake is among

a lower order of creatures. The noiseless, cautious, circuitous mode in which she made her way across a room was cat-like ; the dazed quiet of her eyes on common occasions, had the expression of a cat sitting in the sun ; and the startling illumination of watchful attention in them at other times, recalled to our fancy the same creature catching sight of its prey. Even the low purring, and rubbing of pussy's soft fur against your side, seemed to find its analogy in her slow soft words of flattery : as the gentle approach, which neither required nor even accepted any returning caress, resembled the gliding to and fro on some familiar hearth of that unloving little domestic animal, whose cry is alien and weird to our ears, and its shape like a diminished tiger.

Above all, in her gravity and changelessness, she was cat-like.

The dog (our other household inmate) has his variety of moods, like his master. He is joyous, eager, sulky, angry, restless ; conscious of our love or displeasure ; capable of correction ; able to learn ; has his own preferences too ; welcoming some of the habitual visitors to his master's house, growling at others,—he only knows why. He loves

the children of the house ; he submits to have baby's awkward helpless fat fingers thrust in his eye, without resentment. He romps with the boys, and with his own species ; affecting the fiercest onslaughts, and then mumbling with a mouth like velvet when the mimic war leaves him victor in the play ! He is a creature made up of variety. But a cat is *always the same*. Equally on her guard with friend and foe—stealthy, indifferent, unsympathizing—as willing to gnaw the babe in its cradle as the rat in the barn ; and gliding away to attend to her own private interests let what will be the event of the hour in the household circle of which she forms part. She is a daily mystery, and a nightly annoyance. In the midst of our tame city-life she is *fera natura*. We advertise our dogs as 'Lost, or stolen,' but we say of our cat that she has 'gone away.'

Even in going away she consults her own convenience ; she does not stay, like the dog, because she is ours, and because we are there ; but only so long as she is comfortable.

Alice Ross was comfortable at Glenrossie, and she wished to stay. She saw with curiosity and attention the conscious blush of the young wife,

when she had alluded to the chance of her leaving the castle for a 'pleasant reason.' She herself was not the least embarrassed; she was merely watchful. She was guessing at her new relative's disposition. She finished reaping her little harvest of books, and said her maid would fetch them.

'And when they are sorted, Lady Ross, and all on the shelves, you'll maybe look in to my lonely den, in the Tower-room, and have a gay good laugh at the fittings there; for the walls will match the books, for soldiering. There are prints of most of the notable heroes of modern wars; and there's one, the best of all, that I spent a golden piece or two getting framed, and I'll leave you to guess who *that* will be.'

And the upward glance and grave smile were again directed to her tall half-brother, who had risen from his seat and was turning over the leaves of one of the 'military grammars' with some interest. He was rather touched too at the mention of the 'lonely den,' and he gave a little friendly tap to the pale cheek of his half-sister, saying gaily, 'Well, this hero will come and see your other heroes to-morrow; and so will Gertrude.'

The little tap on the cheek was more or less pleasant to Alice ; but it woke no dimpling smile nor tender answering look.

‘I would like very much to show them all to Lady Ross,’ she said, quietly.

For one wavering moment Gertrude seemed about to speak. She, too, was touched at the solitary picture of life in the ‘lonely den ;’ she thought of saying something kind to her new sister-in-law.

‘Call me Gertrude ; do not call me ‘Lady Ross,’ was the sentence that rose to her young lips. But there was a brief space of chill silence, no one could say why ; and the words remained unspoken.

CHAPTER XIX.

Alice Ross.

ALICE was the first to break that silence. ‘And how did you leave Kenneth?’ she said; ‘and when will he be coming to Torrieburn? His feckless mother’s been in great distress about him, by what I hear.’

‘Kenneth’s better,’ shortly answered Sir Douglas, as he bent again over a book of military plans; and his handsome brow visibly clouded over.

The illuminated pussy-cat eyes had diamonds in them for a second or two, as Alice listened. She looked first at Sir Douglas and then at Gertrude, who had followed up her husband’s assurance with the words,—

‘Oh! yes, better; so much better; quite well; only not strong yet.’

The words were nothing ; only the manner, the hurried embarrassed manner ; and the blush, another blush deeper than the one which had betrayed her consciousness that Alice doubted over 'the pleasant reason' speech.

What had happened ?

Had Kenneth done something extremely wrong and disgraceful ? something the whole family were to be ashamed of, and shamed by, as soon as it was known ?

Alice thought that quite possible. She knew a great deal of hard gossip about her young nephew, though she had steadily refused to have anything to do with his mother, or to visit her, or admit her to the 'lonely den.'

That tabooed female might call herself 'Mrs. Ross Heaton of Torrieburn,'—or by any other name she pleased,—now she was again married 'more decently;' but to Miss Alice Ross she remained, and was destined to remain for ever, 'Maggie of the Mill.'

Certainly her son Kenneth was very likely to have done something disgraceful.

Or had he merely done something so outrageously extravagant that his uncle had quarrelled

with him? Involved himself past retrieval? ruined himself, in fact, at the very outset of his career?

Alice resolved to go the very next day and make a visit far over the hills, and 'ayont the Falls,' to that Dowager Countess of Clochnaben, who in the opening pages of this history was already a Dowager Countess, though a young widow; and mother to the sickly Earl of Clochnaben and to Lorimer Boyd.

The sickly Earl was still sickly, and still alive; and to say truth, Alice Ross had wasted many a year in endeavouring so to compass her ends that she might become head nurse in that establishment, by marrying the invalid. But the Dowager-widow was too wary for such a plan to succeed; and without absolutely 'cutting' Miss Ross at any period of their long acquaintance, she so plainly held her aloof when her intentions became visible, and so continuously frustrated the cleverest little plots, that Alice became weary of the struggle, and patient perforce.

The Dowager was now an elderly female; the Earl not a bit nearer death apparently than in his weakly adolescence; and the two women

continued friends; though the elder had well-founded suspicions that the younger cherished an idea of succeeding by inheritance, as it were, to the coveted post; and of so ingratiating herself with Lord Clocnaben, that he would *need* her when his mother came to die—and needing her, would marry her *then*.

If it had ever occurred to the Earl of Clochnaben that he would be made more comfortable by having a wife, and that wife Miss Ross, he certainly would have proposed; for he thought of nothing but his own comfort. But it did *not* occur to him. He did not want to be beloved; he wanted to be attended to, and he had already all the attention he could desire. He did not want to be amused; he was not amusable. He wanted his three draughts a-day poured out for him, and his pills brought to him at night. All which had been done, and continued to be done, by his mother's maid, from his boyhood to the present hour.

And so the years rolled on! 'While there is life there is hope,'—and Alice was of a persevering nature. She paid her patient visits to the dull old house and its inmates, and sat at home

on days when the Dowager had intimated that 'if it was fine' she would drive to Glenrossie. She walked by the side of Lord Clochnaben's garden-chair. She played cards with him on week-days; and heard texts expounded, with long wandering 'discourses' and longer wandering prayers, from Lady Clochnaben's favourite 'mee-nister,' on Sundays. It was a curiously dull life, but it suited Alice. Her mother's few friends had formerly sent for her occasionally, for gaieties in Edinburgh; Perth hunts; and county balls; and she had partaken of these moderate pleasures in her own tranquil and reserved manner; neither feeling nor expressing any particular gratitude to those who had invited her; never showing the least glimmer of desire to stay a day beyond the time first appointed; nor knitting intimacies, and promising that eager correspondence which girls so frequently indulge in, with any of her own sex and age, whom she might fall in with on these occasions.

People got rather tired of inviting Alice Ross; and the summonses to assist at gaieties became few and far between. She was not one of your 'useful' young ladies. She never played quadrilles

or waltzes for a stand-up impromptu dance, in a gay party of bright juniors; gracefully shelving herself, as an elderly and faded virgin. She knitted no warm slippers for gouty old gentlemen or chilly dowagers. Her care was confined to keeping her own little toes warm. She never 'sat back' in any body's carriage in her life. She always 'declined to drive' on such occasions—lamenting, with a grave smile, that she was not 'as robust as some folk,' to whom it was indifferent which side they occupied in a barouche. She never pronounced the agreeable sentence, 'Oh! but let *me* fetch it; I am just going upstairs,'—to some lady oblivious of her work-box or carpet canvas. Of the three conjugations, active, passive, or neuter, she undertood only the two latter.

In the apparent decline of the little popularity she had once enjoyed, she showed neither resentment nor regret. It seemed all one to her whether she were invited or left out; whether her mother's old friends died off, or forgot her, or, from any overwhelming grief, were unable to send for her as formerly to form part of their home circle. She had a most discouraging way

of receiving news of such persons; replying to her interlocutors by the two monosyllables of 'Yes' and 'Oh.' The 'Yes' being slightly interrogative, and the 'Oh,' a calm assent, not an exclamation. As thus:

'You have heard, dear Miss Ross, of your cousin Dalrymple's misfortune?'

'No.'

'Well, he was persuaded to enter in that speculation of Indian railways lately planned, so Lady Miller told me.'

'Yes?'

'And he is completely ruined! His eldest girl is going out as a governess.'

'Oh.'

'Lady Miller told me, too, the horrid story of the death of Mrs. Fraser's two little girls by burning; long ago, you know; when Clochnaben was a boy.'

'Yes?'

'There was a Christmas party in the house; and the nurses went down to see the company, leaving a candle near the little beds, and the curtains caught fire in the draught of the door, which had been left ajar; and the poor children's

cries weren't heard because of the music downstairs, and when found they were quite dead—suffocated!’

‘Oh.’

Let it not be supposed, however, from this undemonstrative style of conversation, that Alice Ross was in very truth indifferent to the course of events. In all that touched *herself*, she was keen, far-sighted, and long-remembering. She never forgot an injury. She never omitted an opportunity.

Her cat-like resemblance extended to the order and method of her every-day life. In the open daylight of social intercourse, she was tranquil and unobtrusive, or purring and courteous; but in the darkness of solitary hours—in the Lone Den—her mind prowled and capered, and took its light leaps in pursuit of prey. There, the dazed eyes resumed their brilliant watchfulness; and gleamed over the gloom of her destiny. There, the many calculations for small and great ends were methodically arranged, and plans laid for besieging, undermining, and beleaguering, such as find no place in military books. The tactics of Elian were nothing in comparison with the tactics of Alice.

Not that she was always successful. There is such a thing as being *too* cautious, too calculating; in common parlance, 'too clever by half.'

Those who have settled and secret motives for all they say and do, are apt to ascribe the same amount of motive to others; and to found their strategy upon a state of things which does not exist. Sometimes therefore she over-reached herself, and was *déroutée* by the very simplicity of those with whom she had to deal. The ground she had to march over at such times afforded no cover for sharp-shooting or ambuscade.

Still she studied unremittingly; and endeavoured to master the peculiarities and varieties of characters very different from her own. Her half-brother had been one of her earliest studies. Almost as soon as she could think at all, she thought about him. That shy, impressionable, passionate, generous nature seemed revealed to her understanding, though in matters of feeling they had no link in common. She had a great opinion of his power to charm, though she scarcely knew why. For a great number of years she had continually expected him to marry; then came a phase of time when she entirely rid her mind of

any such disagreeable expectation ; and then, as life faded away, and the 'pleasant reason' for leaving her own lonely den did not occur, she grew to hope such an event was out of the question ! She had 'kept house' for Sir Douglas during his intervals of home residence. Now, all that was over. There sat the sunny-haired, dove-eyed contrast to herself, enthroned and idolised.

Alice did not like it.

CHAPTER XX.

Lady Clochnaben.

THE morning after her display of military books she rose early, and putting on her short well-fitting riding-habit, she rode her Highland pony across the hills to Clochnaben.

As it was no part of Alice's tactics to be frank, she did not begin with the real purpose of her visit, namely to discover anything Lorimer Boyd might have written about Kenneth; but affected to have made her early expedition in order to inform her dear Lady Clochnaben that the bride was now arrived and settled at Glenrossie.

She drawled forth this news, and the impression made upon her by the bride, slowly and quietly, without apparent eagerness or interest. The Countess of Clochnaben was standing with her hands behind her, superintending the planting

of some trees, when Alice alighted from her pony.

She was so tall, and stood so firmly, that you might think she herself had been planted in the ground; and so thoroughly well planted, that no storm would avail to uproot her. She had been in youth what is termed a 'fine woman,'—very stately; but the worst of immeasurably stately women is, that in old age they are apt to become gaunt. The Countess of Clochnaben *had* become gaunt. She was also very severe in her opinion of others; gaunt in mind as well as body. She kept very early hours. The iron vibration of the rusty old clock in the courtyard, very seldom had the advantage of her in getting the hours of six in summer and seven in winter struck fairly through, before her stern tread was heard on the outer staircase. These morning hours being often chill, and the gusty mountain-gaps full of what Shakspeare calls 'an eager and a nipping air,' she habitually wore over her cap, as a shield against rheumatic headache, a small quilted black silk bonnet; and when she headed her breakfast-table, what with this peculiarity of costume, the rigid and erect

carriage of her tall body, and the prepared severity of her mouth, she looked like a venerable judge about to pass sentence on a criminal.

And, indeed, she was continually passing sentence on criminals. Most of her neighbours and connexions were criminals in her eyes; and she spent her time in reviewing their conduct with much asperity.

The late Lord Justice Clerk of Scotland told a friend that, with respect to *females* brought before him for crime, he was 'generally inclined to believe in their guilt.' Whether he held the strict opinion of the Roman Cæsar, that it was a fault in a woman even to be accused or suspected, he did not explain. Neither did Lady Clochnaben explain the grounds of her decisions; but it is certain that she generally concluded females (and most males) whom she summoned for judgment into the Court Session held in her own mind, to be 'guilty.'

She was wont to say, grimly, in speaking of any plan proposed to her by persons she thought incompetent,—'I give it my determined opposition.' And it was on these occasions that her factor—nominally (very nominally) 'factor

to the Earl of Clochnaben'—used to observe, that she was 'an awfu' woman to contravene.' She herself bore out the factor's assertion. She never made use of that common phrase, 'That is my opinion.' She heard the opinion of others; mowed it down with an absolute reversal; and after setting her thin lips, with a sort of preface of negation, said in a hard distinct voice, 'That's my *dictum*.' All her opinions were 'dictums,' and all her 'dictums' were laws.

She was, as I have already observed, very severe on her neighbours. She said she had an 'abhorrence' of sin, and no doubt she had; and she pronounced two 'dictums,' or dicta, that greatly troubled Kenneth's tutor step-father, who was inclined to be liberal in such matters. The first of these was, 'Don't talk to me of temptation; temptations are just simply the sauce the devil serves up fools with.' And the second, 'God's mercy is a great encouragement to obstinate offenders.'

Indeed, offenders of all kinds, obstinate or repentant, found no favour in her eyes. Heaven might pardon them, but Lady Clochnaben could not.

She had a sort of gleam of indulgence for the

invalided Clochnaben. He was not 'a sinner,' but a 'poor creature.' She was not exactly fond of him; because (as the same shrewd factor who considered her 'an awfu' woman to contravene' observed) there were two words which were not to be found in her leddyship's vocabulary; '*fond*,' and '*give*.' She was both fierce and parsimonious. But what little milk of human kindness there was in her rugged nature, and what narrow notions of sacrifice, either of her own time or personal comfort, existed there,—existed for the behoof and benefit of Clochnaben.

Once, indeed, she had been betrayed into a burst of something almost like maternal tenderness.

When Mrs. Fraser's two little girls were burnt, Clochnaben (a very timid, helpless lad) had fled from the scene; and, for a brief space, it was thought he, too, might have perished. He was found, however, crouched in the garden, and brought back to the house. When his mother beheld him safe and unsinged, in the gladness of her surprise she caught him to her breast with a hearty embrace. But immediately afterwards, recollecting the needless terror and anxiety she had endured on his account, she thrust him from

her with one vigorous hand, just far enough to administer with the other a remarkably well-directed pugilistic blow in the pit of the stomach, exclaiming, 'That will teach you not to trifle with my feelings another time.'

She did not permit any of her feelings to be trifled with. She had watched Alice Ross's attempt to marry him with more displeasure than fear. She did not choose that he should marry. She gave all such schemes 'her determined opposition.' She always looked beyond the frail life of her eldest son, to Lorimer Boyd. Lorimer was to marry. Clochnaben was to die single. She looked upon him as a sort of *locum tenens* and temporary representative of the family; the future fortunes of which were to be in the hands of his brother, after he should be quietly reposing in the family vault. She was extremely proud of Lorimer. She had the poems which he published as a young collegian, bound in scarlet morocco and laid conspicuously on the table in the great sitting-room,—a room hung round with the hard portraits of his ancestors; and she boasted a good deal of his abilities to her few intimate friends.

She had often boasted of her son Lorimer to Alice Ross ; and now, when that astute little personage in the grey riding-habit had made her announcement of the arrival of young Lady Ross, an impatient sigh and a 'glowering' look told at once that neither the bride nor the subject were particularly welcome.

In truth, if Lady Clochnaben could have given this marriage her 'determined opposition,' she would have done so with quite as much vigour as the reader of the tactics of Elian. Her woman's instinct told her, hard woman though she was, that Lorimer Boyd had taken an interest in Gertrude Skifton beyond what he chose to admit. It was not for nothing, she thought, that after mentioning the Skiftons in every letter he wrote,—quoting them, praising them, delighting in them,—he suddenly 'kept silence even from good words;' and, after once or twice mentioning in a gloomy and constrained way the parties they were making with Sir Douglas and Kenneth at Naples, ceased altogether to comment on their existence.

Lady Clochnaben was of opinion that Lorimer 'had thought of the girl for himself.' And

though she probably would have considered such a match,—in spite of Gertrude's fortune and good connexion on her mother's side,—not nearly good enough for the condescension of her consent,—still she resented the chance being taken out of her power, and her favourite son being, as she shrewdly suspected, wounded and disappointed.

They were cousins, too, by a sort of distant Scotch cousinhood; the Clochnabens and Lady Charlotte Skifton; and, though they repudiated all knowledge of the Skifton element in the family, they considered Lady Charlotte to be bound to them by that inextricable tie.

Lady Clochnaben had no motive for reserve, and she abused the young Lady Ross in round set terms; though she did not know her. She sneered a good deal at Sir Douglas. She hoped the marriage *might* turn out well, but that sort of marriage very seldom succeeded. She condescended to say she would come over 'to the castle,' 'though the bride little deserved such attention,' and that Clochnaben would come also: that was enough.

Then she entered on a branch of the subject

most eagerly listened to by Alice: the gossip that had percolated through various channels respecting Kenneth's admiration for Gertrude, and how his uncle had cut him out, and what a worthless sinner Kenneth was. And old Lady Clochnaben gave a jocose little shake to the black quilted bonnet, with a grotesque attempt at gaiety; for she thought it a good joke that Kenneth should be ousted and outwitted, though she thought it no joke at all that her son Lorimer should lose *his* chance of winning the same prize.

And all being said that could be said, in croaking dispraise of the new-married couple, the black-capped judge proceeded to the trial of another cause. With which indeed Sir Douglas was also more or less connected: the said cause being the conduct of the Episcopalian clergyman on the estate of Glenrossie, who was actually endeavouring, 'most improperly'—as the irate Dowager expressed it,—to get a disused burying-ground consecrated for burials in his own parish!

Now the small Episcopal Church and its interests had been confided by Sir Douglas to Savile Heaton, the tutor who had married

Maggie, on that gentleman's own petition; and it was hardly possible to imagine a greater complication than the state of matters induced by this arrangement. Scanty as the population was, there was a Free Kirk, a Scotch Established Church, and the somewhat decorated little temple of worship over which Mr. Savile Heaton presided, the Episcopalian Church,—on which he spent the very slender funds he could command of his own; in which he preached rather elaborate sermons; and for which he had trained a little band of singers, accompanied by a small organ.

The amount of fierce quarrelling among the differing Christians of these three churches; the frenzy of scorn; the sly backbiting; the consigning of each other's souls to eternal and unavoidable perdition; the losing sight of all the reality and purposes of prayer in the rabid disputes of how prayer should be offered up,—was a spectacle for men and angels!

Maggie held with her husband; though she yawned all through the sermon, and frequently came to afternoon church in a state of drowsy half-tipsiness.

Her father, the old miller, went to the Free Kirk; her mother to the Established, 'as a decent body ought;' and they agreed in little except in being generally 'fou' on a Sunday evening.

Lady Clochnaben was Presbyterian; and so was Miss Alice Ross; and both these ladies belonged also to that wide-spread and influential sect, the Pharisees. They were continually thanking God that they were better than their neighbours; and lost in contemplation of the mote in their brother's eye.

On the morning that Alice had chosen to ride over to the grim grey castle on the misty hills, Lady Clochnaben had received a letter from Lorimer which extremely displeased her: a letter in answer to one of her own, in which she expressed her intention to give her 'most determined opposition' to schemes of the sort set on foot in the neighbouring parish by Mr. Heaton, and requested Lorimer to remonstrate with Sir Douglas Ross respecting the conduct of that gentleman.

She called her son's attention to a report of proceedings elsewhere, respecting the consecration of a cemetery; sending it thickly interspersed, at

its impressive passages, with dashes from her firm hand in rigorous lines of ink. She said Savile Heaton had defended his opinions by the absurd and overstrained piece of reasoning,—that God having chosen to make the body the visible temple of a living soul, it behoved man surely to lay back the clay He had so honoured, with reverent farewell prayer, in the earth which He also created. She considered the extract she sent ‘a full and sufficient answer to such twaddle.’ Such sentences as the following met with her especial approval:—

‘This was a Presbyterian country; where the consecration of burying-grounds was not only considered a thing of no use, but was condemned as superstitious and allied to Popery. Consecration of the sold portions of the cemetery was an insult to the proprietors of the ground. Churchyards and churches, and many other places, were consecrated many hundred years ago; but the Reformation swept these consecrations away; the will of the nation reduced them to nonentities. To consecrate would be to give the Episcopalians a right to the service of burial. Why should such favour be shown

to Episcopalians? Presbyterians, who had acquired rights of burial in the same ground, might justly feel themselves aggrieved: and others might feel only merriment and surprise that such a ceremony had been indulged in at all. It was good for nothing. The cemetery was neither the better nor the worse for it: though it might indeed lead to a feeling against the cemetery in the minds of Presbyterians, *who would not use it as they might otherwise have done.*'

Could Lady Clochnaben have seen the gloomy and contemptuous smile with which Lorimer read the last sentence, descriptive of the repugnance a right-minded Presbyterian would feel at the notion of being buried in ground defiled by consecration, she would have been still more provoked at his answer; which abruptly said:—

'With reference to your expectation that I should write to Douglas to interfere with Mr. Heaton about the burying-ground, I wonder you do not see that I can do no such thing; nor, if I did, could my meddling be of any possible use. As to my own feelings on the subject, if people prefer to be buried like dogs, let them be so buried; but I quite agree with Savile Heaton,

that the clay which once held a human soul should not be returned to its parent earth as we shoot out rubbish on a midden ; and I cannot see why a piece of ground which is of neither use nor value to the present community, should remain useless, merely because people were formerly so buried in it. The consecration will not, I presume, affect the poor dust lying there ; though, by the report you send me, it may discourage future corpses of the Presbyterian persuasion.'

'This comes of residing abroad, you see, Alice,' said the Dowager, as she gave a vicious tightening to the folds of the letter, and then tapped it with her bony fore-finger. 'Lorimer is grown into a Latitudinarian, and, for aught I know, into something worse. But I'm just resolved to fight out this matter, and I'll do it. The very idea of the Torrieburn folk makes me sick ; and if you can't crush a man one way, you can another—that's my dictum.'

Whether, like the wrathful king who rashly said of Thomas à Becket that he wondered he had no subject who would rid him of that priest, and so procured his murder,—the angry Dow-

ager expressed before any very unscrupulous party her opinion that the place would be well rid of Mr. Heaton,—cannot be clearly known; but his position, never a very comfortable one, was made more and more intolerable by a series of small and great annoyances, the last of which was attended with some danger, not only to him, but to Gertrude Ross, and Sir Douglas.

An anxious consultation had been held, as to the terms on which Mrs. Kenneth Ross of Torrieburn, now Mrs. Heaton, should stand with the young Lady Ross. Alice had resolutely stood out, even in her loneliest days, against any communication with her. ‘She was not recognised by her mother,’ was her sole observation when pressed on the subject.

But Gertrude leaned to peace; and to that quiet dealing with unfortunate events in families, so seldom adopted—though, if the dignity of reserve towards the world, on which such apparent indulgence is founded, were more common, scandals would be kept private which the world only mocks at, and the persons affected by them would be the happier. It was decided that Lady Ross should pay her visit to Torrieburn.

To 'cut' the widow of Sir Douglas's brother,—the wife of the clergyman who had brought Kenneth up,—would have been a very harsh and difficult step to take. Intimacy was not desirable, was not probable; but countenance and acknowledgment towards one so nearly connected with Sir Douglas, seemed almost imperative.

To Torrieburn, Gertrude drove with her husband; and shuddered over the account he gave, at the fatal bridge by the Falls, of the death of his brother. Her mind still full of the tragic tale, and of the description of Maggie herself in her youthful beauty, Gertrude entered the drawing-room, and was received by the occupant.

Mr. Heaton was a shy, earnest-looking man, who spoke very little, and kept glancing at his wife as if all the years that had passed had failed to quiet his expectations of her doing or saying something that would shock others.

Maggie herself was beginning to grow rather fat and coarse, though still handsome. She was dressed in the most *outré* style of the fashion, according to that peculiar faith in milliners which makes English, Scotch, and Irish women believe that they ought to put on, at their own firesides,

toilettes which the French either never wear at all; or only wear when dressed for visiting, and driving in the Bois de Boulogne.

Maggie was a hundred times 'finer' than the bride; and with her finery she had adopted a sort of affectedly jolly, defiant manner, by which she intended to show that she neither desired to be patronised, nor would submit to be 'looked down upon.'

All she said and did, jarred with the feelings of compassion and interest with which Gertrude's mind had been filled.

As to Maggie, she saw Gertrude with bitter prejudice. Kenneth,—her wild, insolent, vain Kenneth,—had not observed the silence practised by Lorimer Boyd towards his dowager mother. He had told his less awful parent that he was in love, and was beloved again; and Maggie, remembering all his letters, took the view consequent upon them; namely, that she saw before her the jilting coquette who had 'thrown over' the young lover, to become possessed of Glenrossie Castle, and make a more wealthy marriage.

The visit was awkward and embarrassed, in spite of gentle efforts at cordiality on the part of

the bride ; all unconscious as she was of what was passing in Maggie's mind.

At length she said to the latter that she would like to clamber up the Falls and look down on the view ; and ' Mrs. Ross-Heaton,' as she called herself, prepared to accompany her. When they had nearly reached the head of the Falls, and while a thick screen of mountain-ash and birch still hid the house they had left from view, a loud report startled them ; and, looking through the trees, they saw smoke issuing from one of the windows.

Descending rapidly, they retraced their steps towards the dwelling they had so lately left, and found Sir Douglas and Savile Heaton standing in front of the house, angrily commenting on some disaster that had just taken place.

On examination it was found that the iron bush of a cart-wheel—tightly plugged up at both ends with wood, in one of which a hole had been drilled, through which it had been filled with gunpowder, with a fuse inserted so as to form a grenade,—had been placed under the window of the drawing-room where they had been talking, and fired.

The bush had burst into splinters; spreading in all directions; passing through the window and ceiling, and lodging in the floor of the room above. Glass was shattered; furniture broken; the smell of gunpowder still floated on the air. Maggie did not scream; she stood panting and staring for a few seconds, and then with excessive fierceness she exclaimed, 'I'd be glad their necks were ground in our mill!'

After which speech she flung herself into the arms of her husband; and there continued sobbing wildly, till she saw, or imagined she saw, the retreating form of a man among the bushes; when she suddenly ceased weeping, and sprang forward, with an activity very surprising in so cumbersome a figure.

No one was discoverable however, and she came slowly back again.

Her husband spoke kindly to her, and bade her take farewell of Sir Douglas and Gertrude, which she did somewhat sullenly; Sir Douglas reiterating to Mr. Heaton assurances of assistance and goodwill.

Gertrude was very silent during the drive home. She had been frightened and bewildered;

and much that she found at Glenrossie was so disappointing. Maggie, so coarse and strange; Alice, so ungenial and alien she scarcely knew why. The squabbles about religious forms, which had been discussed before her, so hideous and yet so trifling!

She sighed, and turned to Sir Douglas, who had also been silently ruminating. She took his true frank hand, and he bent and kissed her as she sat silently there by his side.

Much was disappointing; but what could quench the joy of that love? Much was disappointing; but Sir Douglas, her own Douglas, was perfect; and she was his 'for ever!'

CHAPTER XXI.

Mamma's Letter.

PARADISE had a cloud over it after this. Gertrude could not comprehend bitterness; she had never felt it. Holy thoughts, with her, were peaceful thoughts. She talked a great deal with Mr. Heaton over his troubles and anxieties, and produced a corresponding degree of displeasure in rigid Lady Clochnaben, and watchful Alice Ross. Her principles were very lax, in their opinion. She had even been guilty, one Sabbath evening, of singing. Sir Douglas had caught cold out fishing; his eyes were inflamed; he could not read or occupy himself in any way, and his wife opened her well-worn music-book, and sat down to amuse him with her little store of melodies, in the most natural way in the world. Lady Clochnaben was spending a couple of days at Glenrossie. She

stared at the bride; and, clutching the two arms of the high-backed chair in which she was seated, so as to give herself a stiffer and more authoritative *pose*, she said sternly, 'Lady Ross, you're surely forgetting what day it is!'

Gertrude looked wonderingly round.

'Gertie only remembers that it is the day after I have taken cold,' laughed Sir Douglas.

'You should not encourage such doings at Glenrossie,' said the Dowager severely; 'there never was mirth or singing since *I* can remember the place, on such an improper day as the Lord's-day.'

'I really do not understand,' said Gertrude.

'Don't you know, Gertie,' said Sir Douglas, 'that we Caledonians are so strict in our observance of the Sabbath, that singing and suchlike diversions are forbidden? There is a sad story extant, of a lady who lost her pet dog for ever, —because, when it strayed, the gentleman friend she was walking with was afraid to whistle for it, on account of the day being Sunday.'

'The Lord forgive us! Is *that* the way you mean to instruct your wife!' exclaimed the fearless Dowager; setting her spectacles at Sir Douglas.

Alice said nothing. She looked up with a plaintive, pitiful glance, at her half-brother; shook her head slightly, as much as to say, 'This will never do!' and then, slowly rising, with a volume of explanations of the prophecies of Eze-kiel in her hand, she crept away from the pro-fanity, and went to bed.

Gertrude rather pined for her mother, in this alienated state of things; she had been used to love and petting from that tender though weak-minded companion. But the youthful-elderly was making a happy little 'season' in London. She was in no hurry to leave the metropolis; to for-sake the circle of recovered friends, and discourage their invitations by burying herself in the High-lands.

'I will come to you, my darling,' she wrote, 'but not just yet. I would like to come in the autumn, when you have a nice shooting party, and then see your hills and heather braes. I have such a pretty little house in Park Street! such a sunny drawing-room, and a little boudoir (you know how I love a boudoir), with a Louis Qua-torze looking-glass, and a quantity of lovely little odds and ends. I was lucky to get it! It was

advertised as a "bachelor" house, and now they say it belonged to a "bachelor of the other sex;" but that makes no difference. I mean it does not signify to me who lived here before me, of course. And indeed the proof that it doesn't signify at all, is, that all my friends call, and call, till you'd think they would never have done calling! And I am constantly asked out to dinner, when they want a lady in a hurry and some one has failed, and in the same way I am asked to accompany young married friends to the opera. I assure you I have spent a very pleasant time, and am quite pleased to see how little forgotten I am; for I certainly thought people rather cold about your wedding; but then we had only just arrived, and I had not gone the round with my cards, you know.

'There has been a magnificent *fête* at Devonshire House, and the Duke came up to me directly, and said how rejoiced he was to see me, and that he did not think I had altered *the least* in the last fifteen years. And he asked after you, too—at least, he asked after "my children;" and when I told him I had lost my poor boy, and that my other child was a daughter who was grown up and married, he seemed quite surprised! And

only that he was obliged at the moment to go and be civil to somebody else, I meant to have seized the opportunity of begging him to remember *you* when you came to town; but you can call there with me, and that will do as well,—I mean as well as my speaking about you.

‘ And now, dear, I will conclude, and promise faithfully to come to you later in the year. You know it is said to be as well, after marriage, to “leave the young couple awhile to themselves.” Excuse my *little joke*; for, of course, you are not a “young” couple: I mean Sir Douglas is not young, though you are; and *that* made the joke; but it need not vex you, for he is a great deal handsomer than any young man I see going about, and I always thought him handsomer even than his saucy nephew, of whom I hope you have good news, and that he will keep out of the way.

‘ Your ever affectionate Mother,

‘ CHARLOTTE SKIFTON.

‘ P.S.—My dearest Gertie, I re-open my letter, because I really cannot let it go without telling you such a piece of good news! I have just got my card for one of the Royal Balls!

‘ I went, you know, to the Drawing-room, the very first thing I did, after all the fuss of your marriage, &c. was over ; but the Court being new, and all that, I really did not feel sanguine about being remembered : and I can’t tell you how pleased I was when I opened the big envelope just now, and out came the Lord Chamberlain’s card !

I went to the Drawing-room in very dark garter blue, with my few diamonds very prettily arranged : and I did think of wearing pink for this occasion, but perhaps it would be thought too *young*, you know ; people are not good-natured : so I shall go in pale silver grey and pearls, or in mauve. I understand mauve is Her Majesty’s favourite colour ; but perhaps for that very reason she may be wearing it herself ; and that would incline me to the grey, especially as I have not been to a Court ball since your poor father died ; and I have always thought a widow should wear very quiet colours, at all events for a good while after her mourning is over.

‘ I suppose you will attend the very first Drawing-room next season ? Sir Douglas must wish that : and you will have plenty of time to think about it beforehand. I advise you to em-

ploy Madame Albertine Chiffonne; she is just come to set up in London, and is quite the rage among the fine ladies, and very busy. But she has promised, however overwhelmed with orders she may be, that she will give *me* the preference first; and was uncommonly civil.

• ‘I have Isidor as coiffeur; I think he has more taste than Cavalier. He amused me very much with stories of how busy he was at the Coronation of our Queen Victoria. He said he dressed a hundred and fifty-four heads between the evening and the next morning. It sounds very incredible, don't it? but then a good many had their heads dressed overnight; and slept or sat up in arm-chairs, or leaning back on the sofas; and a good many met at each other's houses,—to save time, and make sure of Isidor,—and they sat in a long row, while he and his assistants brushed, and oiled, and plaited, and twisted, and twirled, till he said he had scarcely any sensation left in his fingers and thumbs!

‘And the old Marchioness of Timberly was so afraid he would be tired, and not finish her head off properly (being one of the last), that she kept offering him claret every two minutes, saying,

"Take another glass, Mr. Isidor, I think your hand droops." "Certainly," he said, "if I had swallowed all the wine that old lady offered me, I should no longer have distinguished where the heads were that I was to dress."

'And what do you think, Gertie, of the speech of that handsome, eccentric Mrs. Cregan, whom Lorimer Boyd used to admire so—when I told *her* the story? She said, "More fools they! I rolled my hair in a smooth twist, and walked across the Park to Westminster, in the cool early morning, with my brother; for I considered it a day on which of all days in the year I was least likely to be looked at, and most likely to endure great fatigue. I knew the streets would be crowded; the carriages dead-locked from their numbers; and the only thing I wished I *had* taken overnight, was my breakfast; for it was impossible to get the servants to attend to anything on that eventful morning."

'So like Mrs. Cregan, wasn't it? taking things in that cool sort of way. I dare say just as cool about the Royal balls.

'Well, I ain't like her, Gertie, and I declare my hand quite shakes while I write to you about

it, only I thought you would be glad to know Her Most Gracious Majesty had not forgotten me, but has sent me a card.

‘This P.S. has grown quite to the length of another letter, but you can’t wonder at that, because of what I had to say.

‘Your affectionate Mum,

‘C. S.’

‘Here is a visitor you will be glad to see, Gertrude,’ said Sir Douglas, cheerily, opening the door just as Gertrude had got to the end of the little fine *pattes de mouche* of her mother’s writing. ‘Here is Lorimer, on a two-months’ leave, come to look after Clochnaben! You must persuade him to give us as much as he can of his time. You are lady of the Castle now, you know.’

Gertrude rose, and fixed her glad soft eyes on Lorimer’s countenance; not without a certain degree of nervous trepidation, remembering all that had occurred, and the confidence she had placed in him, when Kenneth’s reckless love-making and yet more reckless threats, made her fear she scarcely knew what, for Sir Douglas.

Lorimer also seemed a little nervous; though

his manner was generally impassive. His hand was icy-cold as he took hers, and his eyes were averted. He gave a short stifled sigh, and stood for a moment in one of the oriel windows.

‘It is a long time since I was here,’ he said.

The sadness with which he spoke was so obvious, that Gertrude longed to ask him if aught had occurred to fret him: but there are men whose reserve you dare not break through, however real your sympathy may be with their supposed sorrow. Lorimer was one of these men.

Gertrude felt embarrassed: and, to help her embarrassment, she held out her mother’s letter.

‘I have just heard from mamma,’ she said; ‘you can read her news if you like.’

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